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Whatever Happened to Old...

Several months back, I had a call from a reader asking if there was anything new in slipsheets. For whatever reason, I've not seen many slipsheets (and you can also spell it as two words or hyphenated) while visiting distribution centers in the past few years.

Then, about the time I thought the species might have gone extinct, at NA 2008 (the big material handling show this year), I ran into a guy with a new take on the slipsheet. And, almost embarrassingly, these are manufactured here in our Cleveland backyard, Hartville, Ohio. It's called the slip-tray.

But, first, a bit of education on the slipsheet—and why I thought it might be headed in the same direction as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

A slipsheet is a unit-load support device. The structural strength of the slipsheet supports the product load's weight. Often, the sheet is used on top of pallets. Loads can be pulled or pushed with special attachments on lift trucks and subsequently floor loaded into trailers to save space and weight during transport. Loads on sheets can also be floor stacked in buildings; however, safety concerns usually keep them to two tiers high.

Depending on the material of the sheet (corrugated, plastic, fiber, etc.), some can be conveyed, most not. If there is proper support within the racks, loads on sheets can be placed in racks, though not often. Sheets can have a single lip or multiple lips for the lift truck attachment to grab and pull the load onto the fork tines.

There are numerous advantages and disadvantages to using slipsheets. The pros and cons make good barroom fodder since there's no logical conclusion. I'll skip to the latest iteration of this venerable material handling device—now called the slip-tray.

I was talking with Steve Trickett of Enviropak (www.enviropak.ws) at the show. His

product neutralizes a lot of the negative aspects of a slipsheet. In a serious barroom confrontation, however, it might not technically be a slipsheet. It's sort of like putting an asterisk before the name of a homerun hitter.

His sales pitch was focused on the environmental benefits of the single-sheet system (even a single 'thing' can be a system in our world). It was the productivity aspects, however, that caught my eye.

The slip-tray is made from recycled plastic resin and can, itself, be recycled. The (approximately) three-inch sides are pre-creased, and interlocking tabs are cut out for easy assembly into the form of a tray. This tray keeps the product from slipping off the sheet during loading. The four short sides also protect the bottom row of product from lift truck damage. They facilitate stretch wrapping and give a wrapped load protection on all six sides if a hood is used.

The square tray has a separate, doubled-over, rounded lip of material on one side. This lip provides the grabbing point for trucks with push/pull mechanisms and gives added protection when tined trucks are used to pick up a load. The rounded design of the lip allows an operator to slide the fork tines under the load—carefully. Normally, bulk loads of sheets are shipped flat, a great storage advantage over pallets. They can be shipped partially assembled, if required.

So, the old slipsheet showed up at the class reunion. It was a bit fatter around the waistline, however, more versatile for the knowledge it gained over the years.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clyde E. Witt". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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