

BUSINESS

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2020

SECTION H

Industrial soap-maker quintuples production

Ecolab adds shifts, 30 temp workers to Huntington plant

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The Journal Gazette

Some companies, including a local distillery, have responded to the sudden demand for hand sanitizer by shifting gears.

Ecolab, a Huntington employer, didn't have to change a thing to do its part in the coronavirus fight. The St. Paul, Minnesota-based company's local facility makes soaps and sanitizers 12 months a year.

But the plant has dramatically ramped up production. Kevin Wiig, Ecolab plant manager, estimated his workforce is pumping out five times to seven times as much product as usual.

The cost of industrial-sized equipment makes it impractical for the operation to invest in more machinery for a temporary surge in demand. So the facility is using existing infrastructure on more shifts.



Nancy Pierce, an Ecolab senior production specialist, performs quality inspections on product labels.

Wiig has added more than 30 temporary workers to his staff of about 100. The facility, which was already operating in three shifts most weekdays, has added weekend production. Some permanent workers have volunteered to work overtime.

"We're trying to maximize capacity at our site," he said.

Ecolab sells to customers in more than 170 countries in the food service, food pro-

cessing, hospitality and health care industries, among others. According to the company's website, Ecolab products help clients "keep their environment clean and safe, operate efficiently and achieve sustainability goals."

A grocery shopper might find Ecolab soap in the restroom. Employees in the same store

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Nikole Barnes, an Ecolab production worker, performs in-process quality checks. The Huntington plant produces soap and sanitizers for commercial customers nationwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant demand for Ecolab products.

Courtesy photos

ECOLAB

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might use Ecolab sanitizers to wipe down surfaces after packaging meat or produce, for example.

The company's worldwide presence has allowed its 50,000 employees to track the COVID-19 pandemic up close, including in China, and share best practices with colleagues in other countries, Ecolab spokesman Roman Blahoski said.

Production has increased at all facilities, some by 10 times to 12 times, he said.

"We have had some delay in certain raw materials, but our team is managing that incredibly well," he said.

The Huntington facility started adding shifts in mid-February.

Wiig is pacing himself as he deals with a ramped-up reality at work. He's trying to keep himself and his team focused on each day, each shift, each hour. He knows he could be one of millions out of work right now because their employers were ordered to close.

"I feel very blessed, and I know a number of our co-workers do, to be asked to do more," he said.

And about those distilleries and other late entrants in the sanitizer market? Wiig doesn't resent the increased competition.

"Every life matters," he said. "So if this means one more person washes their hands, it's worth it."

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