

Downlite Unveils Waste Water Recycling System



Artesian VP Sales Eric Fessler shows off samples of the water before and after treatment by the new Downlite system.

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Josh Werthaiser, Downlite CFO

Downlite recently installed a new waste water recycling system that is estimated to save about 40 million gallons of water annually. The Cincinnati-based down supplier provided details of the new system complete with a plant tour at an event held earlier this month at corporate offices. For a business like Downlite that uses an awful lot of water 24/7 for washing and processing down and feathers for the bedding, hospitality and performance outerwear markets, the new system represents not only immediate benefits in terms of water usage, in addition to long-term cost savings, but also signals Downlite’s continued commitment to environmental responsibility.

The fifth generation family business’ sustainability efforts extend to use LED lighting, adherence to bluesign certification and supply chain traceability, development of down standards, and a focus on animal welfare. Downlite executives agree, however, that this latest effort in water conservation takes corporate eco initiatives to the next level. “The waste water recycling system is a large undertaking that has been

a major project for the past few years. One of the main reasons we’re doing this is we are trying to create a greener company,” said Downlite CFO Josh Werthaiser.

The system was designed, constructed and is operated by Artesian Capital Partners (ACP), a newly formed partnership that brings together established expertise in the water business and the financial arena. Downlite’s waste water recycling system is the first of its kind, according to ACP’s CEO Ed Kidston, who said that customizing water treatment for private industries is a new idea that is catching on very quickly. “We can be specific to what their water quality needs are and that helps make it more cost effective while saving on resources,” said Kidston, who has spent 50 years in the water business with a focus on treatment systems for municipalities and cities. “This is the very first system that we are taking waste water and sending it back (clean) to the customer,” he added.

The Downlite system has already saved approximately three million gallons of water since September. The multi-step system includes flow, starting at wash lines, going to

screens, tank, pumps and return to machines. Kevin Borgquist, director of Feather & Down (F&D) sourcing and processing, led a tour of the Downlite facility while explaining both the F&D process and the new water system integration. When all three giant washers are running with 440-pound batches of feather & down — that go through two wash cycles and six rinses to ensure high-quality cleaning — usage tallies about 120,000 gallons of water every 90 minutes. The water travels the length of the 65,000 square foot Downlite plant, during which it is captured, screened for residue, bio treated and filtered through membranes and then ozone disinfected before being supplied back to the washers. It is a sophisticated and complex system, with remarkable results.

ACP staff operates and manages the system off-site, even composting the sludge that is removed from the water. This allows Downlite to focus on the business at hand while aligning with corporate goals. Stated Werthaiser, “What’s important to us is staying relevant, maintaining and growing our leadership position and minimizing the impact we have on the world around us.” ●