

SonicAire Fan System Dramatically Improves Plywood Plant Housekeeping



“We had to constantly clean our ceiling and rafters to remove any dust and debris that would accumulate,” says Jeff Wakefield of [Columbia Forest Products](#).

It reduced direct labor costs by \$25,000 annually. It boosted morale. It removed a significant maintenance burden from employee shoulders. “We were so happy with the results of the SonicAire fans,” reports Wakefield, current Vice President of HR and former Plant Manager for Columbia Forest Products, “that when I heard the SonicAire CEO was coming by the plant, I sought him out and gave him a big bear hug.”

How did this industrial dust control solution make such an impression? Wakefield shares their story.

“Columbia Forest Products is a leading manufacturer of hardwood plywood,” he reports. “Our 275,000-square-foot Old Fort, North Carolina facility is open-air, with 30-foot ceilings. We had to constantly clean our ceiling and rafters to remove any dust and debris that would accumulate, which were combustion hazards. We were devoting a lot of skilled personnel and overtime hours to do this, and we needed a more efficient solution.”

The manual cleaning process required certified aerial lift operators, safety harnesses, Tyvek suits and additional personal safety gear. The environment was hot and humid, and the work was tedious.

“At first, we tried a large vacuum system,” says Wakefield. “But after a while, we knew we needed something more efficient. We learned about SonicAire and decided to try their industrial dust control fan system.”

“We had a particular need for combustible dust control around one of our dryers, so we installed the first SonicAire fan in that part of the plant,” explains Wakefield. “We took ‘before’ and ‘after’ images of the area, and what we found was astonishing. The fan was able to keep the ceiling and rafters clean and displace the dust to the floor, where we are able to sweep it up and take care of it on a daily basis.”

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— Jeff Wakefield, Columbia Forest Products

They found the 360-degree rotational pattern of the fans particularly helpful. “We can direct the air and adjust it as needed,” Wakefield notes. After the success of the first installation, the company installed a total of 10 fans in various parts of the facility, to target areas where specific pieces of equipment generate high levels of dust.

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Columbia Forest Products uses a system of 10 SonicAire fans to keep their plant ceiling and rafters clean and displace dust to the floor, where they are able to sweep the dust up and take care of it on a daily basis.

“The fans drastically reduced the labor we were using for cleaning,” says Wakefield. “We no longer have to send trained workers on lifts into those areas every quarter. We don’t have to schedule weekends and overtime for workers to do all that prep work and cleaning. We don’t even have to wipe off the flat surfaces on top of the equipment anymore. The SonicAire fans have alleviated all of that.”

This reduction in workload not only saves resources, it has been a big morale boost for employees. “Our workers were very happy to no longer have to bear this cleaning burden,” Wakefield continues.

After the Old Fort plant success, the company went on to next install SonicAire fans in their Chatham, Virginia, plant. “Once we had fans installed in Old Fort and had such success, Chatham personnel also started looking at it. When they saw our results, they installed a fan system for the same reasons.”

“From both a dollar standpoint and employee benefits, the SonicAire fans have been a big win,” Wakefield concludes.

The SonicAire Solution

As the global leader in engineered dust control systems, [SonicAire](#) partners with manufacturers to mitigate combustible dust and create cleaner environments. Applying proprietary BarrierAire™ technology, SonicAire systems use thermal-current control and high-velocity airflow to prevent dust accumulation. The fans offer an engineered, robotic solution to control overhead dust and reduce housekeeping costs, while maintaining safe, compliant conditions.

Each industrial dust control fan system is designed to meet the needs of individual facilities. [Contact SonicAire](#) to receive a custom-engineered solution.



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