Health Care Reform Demands More Responsibility from Employees

Although the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law in March 2010, many employees are still wondering how it will affect their health care coverage provided by General Shale in 2012.

Mark Kinser, Vice President of Corporate Development and Marketing, says he can only know all of the ways employees will be affected in the future, but he does know that employees are going to be held more accountable going forward.

“The new health care regulations will make people think differently about how their insurance is paid for and what responsibilities they hold as individuals,” says Kinser. “We are seeing that not only is there a physical benefit to living a healthy lifestyle, but there will be a financial benefit as well.”

Kinser says those employees who do not use tobacco products will see additional rewards by paying less for health care coverage than those who do. Employees who undergo an annual health assessment also will receive a discounted rate.

“Although the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is still wondering how it will affect their health care coverage, all of our North American facilities are smoke-free environments,” adds Kinser.

“We’re also trying to be a health-conscious company, as all of our North American facilities are smoke-free environments,” adds Kinser.

Kinser says with the new year, it is a perfect time for employees to resolve to be healthier.

Making the decision to lead a healthier lifestyle doesn’t have to be time-consuming. Here are five, five-minute health tips to commit to in 2012.

Be More Active. Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It can help control your weight, lower your risk for several chronic diseases and improve your mood. In less than five minutes, you can take the stairs instead of the elevator, park farther away and walk or vacuum.

Eat Healthier. Choose fruits, vegetables and whole grains rather than foods high in sugar, salt and fat. Grab a healthy snack on the go, such as an apple, nuts, trail mix or low-fat cheese.

Protect Your Skin from Cancer. Put on sunscreen with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and with both UVA and UVB protection, and avoid using tanning beds and sunlamps.

Buckle Up. Just by buckling your seat belt, you can lower your risk of dying in a motor vehicle crash by more than half. For children ages 4 to 7, booster seats reduce injury risk by 59% compared to safety belts alone.

Wash Your Hands. Wash your hands with soap and clean running water for at least 20 seconds to lower the risk of spreading germs and getting sick.

New General Shale logos focus on brand building

We hope that you noticed our new logo featured in our first Impressions newsletter. It marks the alignment of our corporate brand and its related products. In addition to a new corporate brand, we are also introducing three segment logos that have also been realigned to bring more brand equity to General Shale.

You will notice that we are now emphasizing the General Shale name and have added the icon of a flame that aligns with our parent company, Wienerberger, and its distinctive icon. The three segments are General Shale Building Products, General Shale Renovation Products and General Shale Outdoor Living Products. Each segment has a logo that ties it back to our fresh corporate identity while allowing for a greater focus on our products and the markets where they bring value.

MESSAGE
FROM MR. GREEN

Let me first wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope you had a very Merry Christmas and that you were able to enjoy some time off with your family and friends. It’s always important that we take time, not just during the holidays but throughout the year, to enjoy our loved ones and take inventory of the many blessings we have been given.

With every New Year comes the optimism that this one will be better than the previous, so as we kick off 2012, it is essential that we do a better job communicating what’s happening within our organization. There are certainly many exciting things going on for General Shale, and I want each of our employees to be proud and able to celebrate those successes with fellow employees through our new company newsletter. We realize 2012 will be another challenging year, but we believe with the intensified development of our product groups, we have been able to create an offering like none other. We have assembled an impressive portfolio of products. Our Brick products will always be a major focus and at the core of our company, but adding products like Arriscraft®, Thin Veneers and our new line of Outdoor Living products will enable us to stay competitive in the building industry now and in the future.

I want to offer my sincerest thanks to all of you for your efforts last year and my very best wishes to you and your family for a prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,

Richard “Dock” Green
President and CEO
General Shale

http://www.GeneralShale.com

GENERAL SHALE THIN VENEERS: Making the New Look Old Again

This past summer we were excited to be a part of Rescue Renovations, a home improvement show on the DIY network. A local Denver couple began renovating their 80-year-old bungalow and decided to use our thin brick from our Old Brick Original™ product line. Our very own Tony Fabrizio assisted on the show as the thin brick covered a wall that was the centerpiece of the remodel.

The thin veneer product line is extremely important to General Shale because it transcends exterior and interior applications. The products can be used outdoors on new construction or inside to renovate a room. Although the history has been to use it in interior applications, it has most recently become a very popular exterior siding. There are many uses for the thin veneers both in residential as well as commercial. With building starts at their lowest point in years, most people are looking at renovating their current homes which sometimes includes recladding their homes exterior. There is still strong desire for an all masonry home in the U.S., and for those who never thought they could afford it, they are finding that with the overall maintenance and upkeep a masonry home is in fact within their budget.

An important part of the thin veneer recladding is the drainage system that provides a moisture barrier giving the thin product the same attributes as a full-bed brick system. General Shale has developed a continuous drainage system that allows for water drainage, moisture barrier, insulation, high R-value and in most cases less expensive than the traditional systems. The components include a vapor barrier, a continuous drainable insulation panel, along with cement fiber board will allow you to install any thin masonry product to this system. It is cost effective and allows for easy installation. Many of the competitor’s thin brick or rock products used currently do not allow water drainage to pass through. For those systems that are currently on the market and do allow draining, they do not give you the insulation value that our system provides.

With the introduction of this system, it is imperative that we partner with qualified installers to help our customers complete their dream with a solution based thin veneer wall system. Please offer this as the General Shale preferred method for any thin veneer recladding project.
Bricks Fit for a King

General Shale Brick will make a strong effort to market King Size brick in 2012. A half-dozen new colors have been developed for the product line for this year. King Size brick is a more economical choice for the customer because it covers more area per brick, and therefore takes less time to install. King Size brick is being promoted extensively in both the distributor markets and direct sale locations. The distributor market has embraced King Size as evidenced by the large increase in King Size shipments—96% more product was shipped in 2011 than in 2010. But direct sale markets have not been as responsive.

“I believe the reason for the difference in success is the familiarity of the distributor markets with King Size compared to the lack of usage in most of our direct markets,” says Regional Sales Manager Steve Mason. “Although the wall cost calculator can demonstrate the economic advantage of using King Size brick, the lack of historical usage and customer familiarity is hurting these efforts.”

Mason says he feels using visual marketing tools to show builders that King Size does work with the scale of the structures they are building will be key to selling the product. New marketing materials for the King Size brick are currently being developed that will highlight the aesthetics of using King Size brick, as well as highlighting the new colors.

Two new colors of King Size were developed at the Rome, Georgia plant: Granite Ridge and Cortez. At the Mooresville, Indiana plant, three new colors have been put in the product line: Ashford, Coopers Mill and Keeneland. And at the Spring City, Tennessee plant, five new King Size brick colors have been developed: Albany, Colonial Manor, Mr. Rainier, Parkside and Scottsdale. General Shale has an advantage in the King Size brick market in many locations because few other competitors offer the product.

Paving the Way to Success

One of the keys to General Shale’s continued success, even in a down economy, is the ability to adapt to new trends in the industry. One of those trends is the use of pavers in both new and existing construction. 2011 was the biggest year of growth yet for the General Shale pavers market.

“The success of our pavers tells us that there are opportunities to sell material without the benefit of a housing start,” says Corky Clifton, Regional Manager over Outdoor Living products. “In the past, our sales were tied to the number of housing starts. With pavers, we’ve been able to generate revenue without new houses.”

Pavers are being used to beautify outdoor spaces including patios and garden walkways. Pavers are also a smart alternative to a concrete driveway, which can crack over the years.

“We’ve seen more and more buy-in from our employees that this is a valuable revenue source,” adds Clifton. “When you add up all the customers who walk in and buy 30 or so pavers each, that adds up to a large customer base.”

One of the first questions a customer will ask in the showroom is, ‘How hard is it to put together?’ These videos will be great to show the customer right there in the showroom how a kit is assembled and what the difficulty of the project is,” notes Clifton.

Clifton attributes the popularity of the kits, such as the fire pits and fountains, to a couple of things. One is the growing popularity of defining an outdoor area as a “living space” for customers. Second, customers are becoming more cost-conscious. “Really, we’re the only ones out there offering a true ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) kit. Others are sold as an already finished product. We are saving the customer on the cost of having it put together by someone else.”

The idea for the kits came as a result of the customer wanting an affordable alternative to the real masonry block fireplaces that were featured outside many General Shale showrooms. Because those required a mason, they were too expensive for many customers. Now General Shale offers a product for every budget, starting with the “Entertainer” Round Fire Pit to the line of beautiful and intricate “Serenity” fireplaces.

And due to the demand of the Outdoor Living Kits, “how to” videos are being produced for each product.

In 2012, exterior lighting will be added to the building materials supply list. The lighting can be used to accentuate some of the Outdoor Living products on a patio or used in landscaping for both function and beauty. Napoleon Grills, which will be used to create an outdoor kitchen, will be added.

“Another larger item we’ll be adding is a functioning aluminum pergola. It’s designed to be open if you want to let the natural light in, or the slats can be closed to make a solid roof if it is raining,” adds Baker.

Other items to be added to the building materials list in 2012 include accessories to General Shale pavers, such as paver edging and paver lighting products. Most of these items are sold to both the contractor as well as the general public through various showrooms.

New Products Added to Building Materials Inventory

When someone asks Regional Sales Manager Richard Baker what is included in the “building material” repertoire at General Shale, the time it takes him to name them all gets longer every year.

“General Shale used to sell just brick and block,” Baker says. “But in the late ’90s, we found that we could also sell the accessories. Now we sell everything needed to put that brick up on the wall.”

The kit of building materials includes sand, five colors of mortar, angle iron (used to bridge window and garage door openings), key stones (used over window openings), Arriscraft window seals in four colors (used at the base of a window) and even house wrap.

Many of the items, like the house wrap and bags of mortar, are “branded” with the General Shale name. Baker says the additional items help complement a sale and benefit the customer. “We’re making it easier for the customer to get what they need in one place. They don’t have to get the brick at one location and then shop around to find the accessories.”

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2011 was certainly an exciting year of growth for the Outdoor Living product line at General Shale, which includes the Hardscape Kits and Pavers.

“We’re wrapping up our first year of selling the kits, and it’s been a great success,” says Corky Clifton, Regional Manager over Outdoor Living. “We very much exceeded our expectations, basically doubling the number of kits we thought we’d sell in the first year.”

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