

# ISTC Case Study: Sustainability Certification Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (SGP)



ILLINOIS SUSTAINABLE  
TECHNOLOGY CENTER  
PRAIRIE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## GFX INTERNATIONAL

### ABOUT SGP CERTIFICATION

The Sustainable Green Printing Partnership (SGP) provides certification through a publicly vetted set of criteria combined with on-site, third-party validation of sustainability efforts. At its foundation, certification begins with compliance with state, federal, and local laws. The program progresses through the implementation of operational practices and procedures as well as improvement and continuous monitoring of specific metrics (including waste, energy, carbon emissions, social considerations, etc.). The certification is a significant demonstration of organizations that are engaged in commercial printing's commitment to sustainability and is recognizable in the marketplace.

SGP certification involves a third-party audit of written policies, procedures, metrics data, and identification and implementation of a continuous improvement project each year. The certification also requires that certified facilities submit an annual criteria compliance report and metrics report to the certifying body as well as an annual self-audit. Certification is good for two years and re-certification requires an on-site, third-party re-verification audit.

### GFX INTERNATIONAL



GFX International (GFX) based in Grayslake, IL, is a visual communication firm using intelligence, innovation, and inspiration to deliver in-store design, execution, and enterprise solutions to retailers and brands. GFX utilizes state-of-the-art large format digital imaging and finishing technologies to produce products such as menu boards and point of purchase display advertising for its customers.

With over 200 employees and principally operating

out of their headquarters in Grayslake, GFX provides products and services to customers throughout the United States and beyond.

GFX received initial SGP certification in 2010 and was re-certified in 2012 and 2014. They will undergo their third re-certification in late 2016. Their journey to becoming a certified sustainable business began long before their initial certification. GFX's leadership was motivated to become a sustainable business when they began their journey through the environmental compliance process associated with obtaining an air emission operating permit. For GFX, the catalyst to pursue SGP certification was the prospect of enhancing their vibrant business with a convergence of best management practices, lean manufacturing principles, and good environmental stewardship resulting in a more competitive and responsible position in their industry.

In 2008 GFX began tracking their utility and material usage volumes and costs, and then normalizing these metrics based on annual units of production. By normalizing the data they were able to assess whether or not their operational improvements were successful while accounting for increases in sales and number of employees. These documented successes motivated GFX to dig deeper into their operations to identify and implement additional improvement opportunities not only within their manufacturing operations but also their societal impacts. They also wanted to improve communications about their successful business practices with their stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, and the community). SGP certification has helped them solidify these goals and provides a solid message to the public about their achievements and their management system.

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### KEY STATISTICS 2008-2013

	<b>Emissions: 35%</b> VOC Savings <b>100%</b> HAP Savings
	<b>30%</b> Electric Savings
	<b>19.5%</b> Natural Gas Savings
	<b>24.7%</b> Less Water Consumed
	<b>42%</b> Less Landfill Waste
	<b>32.7</b> Less Hazardous Waste

### ABOUT GFX INTERNATIONAL

Established: **1989**

Location: **333 Baron Boulevard,  
Grayslake, IL**

# of employees: **200**

Produces: **Large format graphics printed  
on a variety of media**

NAICS code: **323113**

Website: **[www.gfxi.com](http://www.gfxi.com)**

The Illinois Sustainable Technology Center supports the Sustainable Green Printing Partnership's principles and mission.

Find out more at:

[istc.illinois.edu](http://istc.illinois.edu)

or email [istc-info@illinois.edu](mailto:istc-info@illinois.edu)



## ACHIEVEMENTS

The following are a few highlights of goals and achievements that GFX has implemented since attaining SGP certification:

- ✓ Reduce waste to landfill by setting reduction goals, evaluating waste streams for further reduction and recycling
- ✓ Engage stakeholders, including employees, suppliers and customers
- ✓ Reduce emissions of volatile organic compounds, hazardous air pollutants, and carbon dioxide
- ✓ Initiate a manufacturing and sustainability metrics system
- ✓ Increase public outreach, charitable contributions, and consideration of social impacts

## ABOUT ISTC

The Illinois Sustainable Technology Center is a division of the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

ISTC's mission is to encourage and assist citizens, businesses and government agencies to prevent pollution, conserve natural resources and reduce waste to protect human health and the environment of Illinois and beyond. Visit our website at: [istc.illinois.edu](http://istc.illinois.edu)

## SOLID WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING PROGRAM

Like many other organizations these days, GFX has established zero waste to landfill goals. These efforts strive to improve the programs that they have had in place for many years. All scrap that cannot be reused within the facility is segregated and recycled off-site. Shipping materials, such as pallets and corner protectors, are re-used internally.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

GFX has established programs and instituted efforts to communicate with employees, vendors, customers, and the community about their business and their institutionalized sustainability goals and systems. Sustainable business practices have become part of the culture of the organization.

### • Supply Chain Sustainability

GFX works with their suppliers to assess biodegradability, compostability, and recycling options. They also work with their suppliers to source alternative substrates that minimize environmental impacts, including reducing or eliminating petroleum-derived materials or PVC.

### • Customer Engagement

In addition to working with customers in the design, production and delivery phases, GFX informs customers how to repurpose, reuse, or recycle their products when they are finished with them.

## EMISSION REDUCTION PROGRAM



Beginning in circa 2008, GFX began tracking their annual air emissions [volatile organic compounds (VOC), hazardous air pollutants (HAP) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)] and identifying and implementing opportunities to reduce or control emissions. Many opportunities to reduce their environmental impact through emission reductions

have been put into practice. This includes replacing traditional printing equipment that utilized solvent-based inks with a digital printing press that utilizes ultraviolet-cured inks, which significantly reduces emissions to the environment. Since implementing their emission reduction programs they have completely eliminated HAP emissions and from 2012 to 2013 they reduced their VOC emissions by 35%.

## SUSTAINABILITY METRICS SYSTEM

GFX's comprehensive business metrics system documents and tracks manufacturing productivity, input materials, utilities (water, energy, natural gas), waste, emissions (VOC, HAP, and CO<sub>2</sub>), etc. By normalizing their data they are able to better assess their progress while realizing business growth. This approach allows for a relative comparison versus an absolute one that results from comparing actual annual metrics data. In choosing a normalization factor, GFX uses one that is appropriate to their business.