



Case Study: Innovative Response to Automobile Safety Device Disposal



Overview

Following one of the largest recalls in U.S. history, a global leader in automobile manufacturing called on Superior Environmental Solutions (SES) to help manage the secure and complete destruction and recycling of millions of airbag inflators that were discovered to be a safety risk when exposed to heat and humidity. SES established a process to receive, store, disassemble and safely recycle the air bags. By implementing a tracking system, having secure warehousing, obtaining Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) permits, and developing a patent-pending shredding process, SES was able to manage the high volume of air bags. The process has now expanded to include other automobile safety devices, including seatbelt pretensioners.

Background

In 2014, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) initiated an investigation into automobile injuries and deaths that were believed to be connected with defective safety devices. NHTSA pinpointed the cause as defective airbag inflators produced by one of the world's largest inflator manufacturers. Automobile manufacturers who used these devices were required to recall and store the inflators while the NHTSA performed their investigation. During this time, SES's client, a global leader in automobile manufacturing, called on them for help with storing the inflators. Once the NHTSA completed its two-year-long investigation, millions of airbag inflators needed to be disposed of.

SES made it very easy to coordinate inflator collection. We never experienced any significant problems, and were successfully able to keep track of the VINs received. [Our] storage needs were met as expected. SES was ultimately able to develop the best process for inflator destruction.

- Major global automobile manufacturer

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Challenge

Faced with the accumulation of millions of inflators, the client had an immediate need to find space to securely store the parts. Additionally, due to the hazards associated with the explosive propellant used in the inflators, the risk of injury was high. It was crucial that the defective parts had no chance of reentering the marketplace, where they could cause injury and damage the company's brand. Following the completion of the NHTSA's investigation, the client had to come up with a way to properly dispose of the inflators.

Approach

Having an existing partnership with the client, SES was quick to offer warehouse space, develop vehicle identification number (VIN) tracking methods, and supply manpower to quickly locate and ship any VIN required for testing to the NHTSA. SES's facility, with 24/7 video surveillance, was also an ideal choice to ensure the secure storage of the recalled parts. SES established a system of checks and balances to make certain the inflators received matched what the client was expecting, so all vehicles with defective airbags could be accounted for.

As it became clear that the client would be saddled with the additional responsibility to dispose of millions of inflators, SES went through extensive efforts to develop a full shredder system to handle the destruction. This included meeting all legal requirements; SES even met directly with ATF officials to expedite the permitting and



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with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish environmentally sound disposal methodologies. SES worked with the client through every step of the process, including visiting other companies together to view various processes and learn best practices. SES also knew cost would be a priority and worked to keep rates competitive, while ensuring a state-of-the-art process.

Results

SES developed the most environmentally friendly process for automotive safety device disposal, with 100 percent of the processed materials being sent for recycling—even the shipping box is recycled. By establishing a secure, efficient and economical process, SES was able to safely store and dispose of millions of airbag inflators for the client. In fact, SES has processed more than nine million inflators.

About Superior Environmental Solutions

Superior Environmental Solutions is a leading Midwest provider of comprehensive, vertically integrated environmental and industrial services, including emergency response, waterblasting and hydro blasting, vacuum truck services, sponge blasting, product destruction, recycling and universal-waste management, transportation and waste disposal, and related, complementary services. The company's product destruction services include automobile safety device disposal, complete vehicle disassembly, and crate and cage repair. For more information, visit www.sesinc.com.



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