

SPOTLIGHT ON SKILLS



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Paid To Be Picky

"My job", explained Louetta Hubbard, "is to put myself inside a customer's mind and ask, perhaps a hundred times a day, — will this paper make a quality cigarette."

Louetta, a quality control inspector for tipping products, makes most of her decisions inside a humidity and temperature controlled room packed with scientific instruments designed to make her decisions easier. She is assisted by two quality control technicians.

Their day is accented by sharp thuds and ringing phones. The sharp thuds mark the steady arrival of tipping samples through vacuum tubes. Then the phone rings and an anxious department supervisor wants to know if the product meets the customer's standards.

It's a pressure job. Many samples may come in simultaneously. Machines are running and operators need fast answers. Research people may want to know how a new product is running. "You have to take each day as it comes," says Louetta. "We set our priority hour by hour rather than at the beginning of the shift."

Each sample must undergo a battery of tests in order to receive quali-

ty control's stamp of approval. A sample of printed tipping paper will meet tolerances measured in millimeters that cover the accuracy of the printing. Colors are compared to be sure they are not too light or dark. Trained eyes look for streaks, specs, wrinkles or splatter than can render the roll unacceptable.

Each bobbin of tipping paper meets tight standards for weight, curl, porosity and opacity. Louetta and her crew are on the lookout for variations in bobbin width, print registration, perforation alignment and hole uniformity.

Louetta regularly patrols the various departments that produce tipping. This includes printing; mechanical, electrostatic and laser perforating and slitting. She monitors opera-

tions to try and spot possible problems and she talks to operators to see if they have spotted any potential problems.

"I think it's very important that we understand that quality control can only examine a small fraction of our product before it goes to a customer," Louetta explained. "Our department may evaluate only one second of three hours production or perhaps one meter out of 11,000 meters on a roll."

Louetta appreciates when an operator alerts her to a quality problem, no matter how minor it may at first seem. She concludes, "there's no doubt that operators are in the best position to monitor quality and correct the problem before it reaches the quality control lab." ☉

1 Rhea Marshall and Barbara Raines, QC technicians, examine perforations on tipping paper for hole size and alignment.

2 Louetta Hubbard performs a test which measures the ability of tipping paper to release from the smoker's lips.

3 Linda Carter, a supervisor in converting, discusses the quality of this bobbin of plug wrap with Louetta Hubbard, QC Inspector.

4 Printing on tipping paper is examined by Louetta Hubbard for streaks, splatter or specs.

5 In a test for porosity Rhea Marshall measures air volume through a piece of tipping paper.

6 Keith Wilmot, printing press operator, shows Louetta questionable spot on a sheet of tipping. Strobe lights on the magnifier allow them to see more than just a blur.