

## **Duraflame is chimney sweet**

By David Morrill, BUSINESS WRITER

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IF THERE WERE an art to making a perfect fire, Duraflame would be its master.

Whether it's to have a flame crackle 15 times using coriander seeds, change colors or release a citrus aroma, the company has spent about 35 years looking for new ways to add excitement to the flames in a fireplace.

Based in Stockton, the leader in manufactured firelogs sells about 60 million logs each year.

"We look at the height of the flames, how long they burn and even photograph them to see how the light is emitted," said Stephany Madrid, who has worked Duraflame's quality control department for 22 years. "Throughout the years, our logs have done very well."

The average retail price for the logs are between \$2 and \$3.

In the U.S. market, the firelog industry earns about \$250 million to \$350 million a year. The two giants, Duraflame and Canada-based Pine Wood, comprise about 98 percent. This number includes slightly altered versions made for store-labelled logs such as Safeway that the two companies produce.

Duraflame comprises about 55 percent of the market.

"At one point, we were the Ford of manufactured firelogs," said Duraflame's VP of Marketing Chris Caron. "A little competition now is good because it keeps you focused on trying to do new things."

Duraflame is a spinoff of California Cedar Products Co. (CCPC), the world's leading manufacturer of pencil slats. Both companies are family owned.

The company's idea to create manufactured firelogs came from trying to find a solution to the problem of what to do with the sawdust byproduct left behind from the cedar slats they made.

Initially, the sawdust was either burned or hauled to landfills, but environmentalists said the company needed to find a more responsible way to dispose of the sawdust.

It was then that the idea to make burnable logs emerged.

"At the time there were presto logs which were 100 percent compressed sawdust logs, but they were difficult to light," Caron said. "We wanted to find something that would be much more convenient and efficient."

As a result of two years of research and development, the company discovered that the sawdust mixed and bonded well with petroleum wax, which has high energy and lights easily.

The mixture of petroleum wax and sawdust was named "pasta" by an Italian engineer. It proved to be the easily lightable jackpot that the company sought.

"It works the same way that spaghetti comes out of a pasta maker, except the manufactured logs come out a lot bit bigger," Caron said.

The product was originally called the California Cedar Family Log, but the company knew they needed a more marketable name. A contest was held and the name Duraflame, short for durable flame, emerged.

In 1978, the marketing rights to Duraflame Inc. was purchased by the Oakland-based Clorox Co. It was assumed that because Clorox owned Kingsford Charcoal that marketing another lightable product would be a natural fit.

After sales continued to decline, Clorox abandoned Duraflame in 1982. The following year, California Cedar started marketing the product themselves again.

Eventually Duraflame became its own company even though its products are still manufactured at the California Cedar facility in Stockton.

"It was really like Duraflame No.2 was born, and the business just continued to grow," Caron said. "The new company being made came from a result of the baby outgrowing the parent company."

The original Duraflame log manufactured was the six-pound log that lasts about four hours. It remains the company's No.1 seller.

Even still, the company continues to come out with new logs.

Its newest is the Chimney Maintenance Firelog, released this year. Duraflame advises that one log be burnt each month to combat build-up in the flue.

Other Duraflame logs include Colorlogs, which burn in different colors; Crackleflames, which makes noise, and smaller fire starter logs to be used to help start natural wood.

About a third of all Duraflame logs are sold to California residents, most commonly women living in urban areas.

Besides manufactured firelogs, the company sells fire accessories such as a gel fire starter that gives off a citrus scent rather than a foul gas odor.

The company has primarily found its success in North America, but hopes to make a strong presence in the European market in the coming years.

The biggest challenge for Duraflame in the future comes from new air pollution rules that restrict the use of fireplaces on smoggy nights. As a result of stricter emission laws, nearly all new homes are being built with gas fireplaces, which could one day make those that use manufactured logs and wood obsolete.

Caron believes one of the biggest myths about Duraflame logs is that they emit more pollution than natural logs.

"Fire logs actually burn with one-third of the emissions of a normal wood fire," he said. "It's actually an environmentally friendly way to burn a convenient, aesthetic fire."

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