



## **Alpha Analytical: Testing New Ways to Better Serve Customers through Continuous Improvement** *A GBMP Client Case Study*

Alpha Analytical is the largest environmental laboratory in New England and ranks 11<sup>th</sup> among the top laboratories in the country. In business since 1985, Alpha has earned a national reputation for accuracy and integrity in the testing of air, water and soil, with particular expertise in the highly-specialized fields of sediment and tissue analysis and petroleum forensics. Alpha provides analytical testing services to environmental consultants, large industrial and commercial customer, federal and state agencies and the private sector. Alpha Analytical dispatches couriers daily to pick-up samples in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. These samples are returned to the laboratory where testing is performed in support of site investigations and remediation activities.

In 2011 GBMP Continuous Improvement Manager, Bruce McGill, began working with Alpha Analytical to help them learn and apply continuous improvement principles and methods. The concept of CI is very much in line with Alpha's vision for the organization, which is, "striving daily to be the best provider of analytical services in the United States." James Carlin, owner and CEO of Alpha Analytical, recognizes that the company's "*challenge is to produce the most accurate analytical results attainable in the shortest possible turnaround time.*" And he sees the connection between this service-oriented goal and his employees...

*"Alpha employs professional, ethical people who are passionate about innovating and improving how we do things and how we serve our clients. Alpha is dedicated to bringing out the best in all our employees. We understand the importance of execution. We honestly believe that we must be a team, and we empower our people to embrace, uphold and build on our vision statement. "*

After some initial lean training at the company's Westborough, MA location, Bruce worked with a team of employees to pilot the concept of one-piece flow in their extractions department. The experiment was a huge success and really opened some eyes to the difference between batch and queue and flow processing. Using the one-piece flow method, the Alpha team reduced the time to move 13 samples through the process by 35%. The team realized to make the change

permanent would take some pretty significant reorganization of equipment, such as air hoods, but after seeing the results of their test, the team was committed to following through on the moves. Bruce also helped Alpha Analytical at its Mansfield, MA site. After a short classroom session, a group of employees headed to their work areas to practice 5S/workplace organization methods. Over the next two days 4 small teams engaged in sorting out unneeded items and setting things in order to make their work easier and their day more productive. To sustain these efforts they created 5S checklists, templates for area 5S Communication Boards and completed before and after spaghetti diagrams to measure the results of their improvements. Two of the teams reduced their travel distance by more than 60% by making a few, simple changes to their workplace organization.

GBMP's Bruce McGill saw Alpha's "spirit of improvement" behavior first-hand during his work with employees at both sites.

*"These folks were open-minded about change and were willing to experiment to discover better ways to organize and perform their work. They understood that making their work easier, better, and faster translates into a better outcome for their customers and the company. When you couple this spirit of improvement with hands-on training and the support of the Alpha Analytical management team, there is almost no limit to what can be accomplished. Sometimes, at the outset of a continuous improvement program, it is hard to get people to challenge the "status quo", but at Alpha I found employees arrived at training ready, willing and able to find better ways to work."*

For more information about Alpha Analytical please visit [www.alphalab.com](http://www.alphalab.com)

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