Music.

Dan Heyman: Why don’t you tell us what we’re going to be doing today?

Tim Russart: Well today we’re going to take a walk around the plant here. We’re going to show people just how charcoal briquettes are made in Parsons, West Virginia.

DH: Oh good. Let’s do it.

TR: Alright.

DH: Alright.

TR: Let’s go. So we buy wood waste from a variety of suppliers, large and small, byproducts from wood industry and basically purchase it from them, put it on our pile and make charcoal out of it. This stuff would probably end up piling up or being landfill instead of us utilizing it to make a product. The product that’s been ground, once its ground, in the system at the beginning by the wood pile rolls down along the conveyor belt it comes into a storage bin at this point which is the silver box that you see overhead. Once it reaches that point it’s fed into the rotary dryer which is the long cylindrical tubing you see rotating within the system. What we do is we pull waste heat off of the stack which is easy to see from the road and is a major source of heat in the plant but it goes into the dryer it is probably about 45 or 50 per cent water. What we do is just evaporate the water off and take it down to about five per cent moisture. Right behind us is the exit of the wood dryer which we looked at on the other side; what happens is the dry wood now comes out of that dryer goes through a series of conveyors and up this tall piece of equipment which is a bucket elevator which takes the dry sawdust and actually feeds it into the multiple hearth furnace which we call a retort. So the retort is the large round cylinder that you see behind there. Inside of that there are six different parts that the material flows in and out of and inside of the retort there’s also arms that rotate that sweep the material to keep it moving down through it. So what comes out at the bottom of it is the charcoal that we use to make briquettes out of. So we put the sawdust in the retort, we essentially start it on fire, starve it for oxygen and make charcoal out of it rather than turning it to ash. And that’s the good stuff that we put in our briquettes. We’re about to head into our briquetting operation and that’s where we actually produce and dry the briquettes. We’ll take those materials, we’ll mix some coal, some lime and then we’ll add a starch binder, mix that all together so that it’s good and sticky and run it through a briquette press to make the familiar pillow shape that people will see in the store. Alright. We have two briquette presses that are up behind us and as I said we mix all of raw materials together along with the starch in a mixer and that mix will come to these two hoppers that are above the presses. And basically what a briquette press is, is two turning wheels that have the one half of a pillow shape on them, or a briquette shape on them, when they roll together they press the material out and out come the briquettes out at the bottom. After they come off the presses they look exactly like they’re going to finish up except as I said the screener will knock some of these edges off. At this point they’re moist; they’re very warm because we cooked the starch solution before we added to the briquettes. And basically we have to make them hard enough to survive the ride through here so they can get in to the briquette dryer. This is our briquetting control room and this is Kenny Poling our briquette process operator. From this area Kenny can basically watch the entire process and make adjustments from the comfort of this control room; things go well he doesn’t have to go out of here too often. Our whole plant is automated with process controls that are similar to this and we’ll find this in most of our plants. Twenty years ago you would have seen an operator standing out, on top of the briquette press just watching the press and making sure that nothing is going wrong up there. This is the discharge point of one of our briquette dryers; this is exactly the largest dryer that we have. At this point the briquettes have been dried down to their final moisture, they’ve actually been cooled, they’ve had ambient air circulated through them so at this point they’ll be conveyed to a set of storage silos which we can then pull out and then feed our packaging lines. This is our packaging department, in here we take the briquettes once they’re finished and we either take it straight in to a packaging line and make Kingsford Briquettes out of them which is in the familiar blue and white bag or we pre-apply lighter fluid to it to make our Match Light instant light product. So one of the lines today is running Kingsford, the other one is running Match Light as you can see. And once we fill the bags we can do a variety of things with them. We can either put them straight on a pallet as a single bag or we can wrap them into a four pack or six pack whatever the customer wants. And once they’re wrapped and then they go to a final stage of being palletized, put on a pallet, at that point we pick it up and take it away to our warehouses. And that’s how you make charcoal.

DH: Thanks Tim.

TR: My pleasure Dan.

DH: Appreciate it.

TR: Alright.

DH: For West Virginia Journal, I’m Dan Heyman in Parsons.