



Shirlanne, BASF

As part of the spray foam team, Shirlanne tests materials, troubleshoots quality problems, and ensures the resins being produced meet specification. She has been with BASF for 41 years and a member of the Polyurethanes team for over 23 years.

Tell Us about yourself.

I migrated to Canada in 1977 from Trinidad. While in Trinidad, I earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture from The University of the West Indies with an Animal Science major. At the time, I wanted to be a veterinarian. I qualified as a candidate for the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program at University of Guelph, Ontario. To earn tuition, I worked for two years and during that time, I decided that I no longer wanted to pursue becoming a vet.

Q: How did you get in the industry?

My current job was ending so I started searching for openings at other companies. I saw a posting for a Quality Technician at BASF. I got the job and started in April 1980. Initially, I tested products made mainly for the textile and leather industries. Later, it was plant-based printing inks and chemicals used in paper mill processing. I joined the Polyurethanes division when they were introduced at the Toronto site in 1982.

Q: What changes have you seen in the spray industry over the years?

I've been doing the quality control of spray foam for approximately 13 years. In the past, spray was done by male technicians. I started spraying in 2008 after a co-worker retired. By then employers were starting to embrace diversity and inclusion so they were open to a woman in the position. Also, more women were interested in joining the spray business.

Q: How have you seen the industry change over the years?

I see constant reformulation of spray foams. Many changes have been made to improve the chemistries to more environmentally friendly ones that are less damaging to the ozone layer. Today we've transitioned to HFO based chemistry. These are non-ozone depleting and have low global warming potential.

Q: What challenges have you faced working in this industry?

Whenever there's a new formulation, there's countless testing that needs to



be done. We need to ensure the newer versions are equal in spray quality with the previous tried and true batches.

You must constantly monitor, report, and adjust flaws in consultation with the chemists. The chemistries are constantly being sprayed and adjusted until they are perfect.

Q: What advice would you give women interested in the industry?

If you have the patience for trial and error, love experimenting, and have a desire to improve the products we use daily then this job is a great match. It's rewarding to discover newer, faster, safer methods of producing and using a product, or helping to improve the environmental profile of its chemistry. If this interests you, then don't hesitate to become part of a team within the industry!