

Cutting Material Waste in a Bespoke Chain Manufacturer

Sustain⁸

CHALLENGES

The client manufactures bespoke metal chain components for luxury leather goods. Employing just 21 people, it produces finished metal chains for onward supply into leather goods final assembly. Despite its size, the operation runs a wide range of precision processes including cutting and forming, washing, grinding, polishing, sizing, plating, and packing.

Material efficiency is critical in this environment. Even small losses quickly translate into disproportionate cost impacts, particularly when working with high-grade steels and multiple consumables. At the start of the project, material waste averaged 0.22 kg per kg of chain produced per week, prompting management to set a 10% reduction target that balanced ambition with operational realism.

As with many small manufacturers, resources were limited. Teams already covered multiple roles, and there was little appetite for complex improvement programmes or capital expenditure. Any initiative needed to be practical, fast to implement, and clearly beneficial.

OUR APPROACH

Rather than tackling waste as a single issue, the team focused on specific material streams where losses were most visible and actionable. A cross-functional group of seven people, drawn from across the business, worked over a nine-month period to test and embed a small number of targeted changes.

Waste reduction in a resource-constrained manufacturing environment

Client: Chain manufacturer

Industry: Metal components for leather goods

RESULTS

● **26%**
Material waste reduced

● **~€72,000**
annual saving from steel waste reduction alone

● **5 MONTHS**
payback

One key action addressed abrasive materials, improving usage control and replacement practices. A further action focused on steel waste, tightening handling and recovery to reduce unnecessary loss. Three additional actions targeted plastic waste, addressing segregation, reuse, and disposal practices. Each change was simple, measurable, and embedded into day-to-day routines.

THE RESULTS

- **Waste reduction:** Material waste was reduced by 26%, more than doubling the original 10% target by the end of the programme.
- **Cost impact:** Reduced steel waste delivered an estimated €72,000 saving over one year, representing the largest financial benefit.
- **Payback:** Based on prevailing 316L steel price indices (July 2024), the improvements achieved a payback period of approximately five months.
- **Delivery model:** All gains were achieved without additional headcount or capital investment, relying on clearer practices, awareness, and team ownership.
- **Wider impact:** The project demonstrates that small manufacturers can achieve substantial operational and environmental improvements through focused, workforce-led change.



UNLOCKING SUSTAINABILITY

- Small sites can deliver big impact: Scale is not a barrier to meaningful improvement.
- Focus beats breadth: A few well-chosen actions can outperform larger programmes.
- Engage everyone: Cross-functional ownership is critical when resources are limited.