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Solar Window Films: Success Stories

Thomas Cook keeps a cool head with eco-friendly window film from Solar Gard

Kris Vroman, Business Owner Proglass
Jean Marie Baetens, Head of Infrastructure Thomas Cook Belgium
Bert Frits, Safety Coordinator Thomas Cook Belgium

Installation Summary

Problem:

- Intense solar heat due to the large number of windows
- Unbearably hot working environment for more than 600 employees
- Glare on computer screens made documents difficult to read

Solution:

Solar Gard Silver 35

Amount of film:

950 sq. meters (10,000 sq. feet)

Benefits:

- Rejected 61% of solar heat; improved comfort of employees
- Rejected 62% of solar glare; employees can read documents much more easily
- Swift, quiet and clean installation; no employee downtime during installation
- Savings on energy costs

About Thomas Cook

Thomas Cook has been an established international holiday brand for nearly 170 years. Its worldwide headquarters (HQ), located in the business district of Zwijnaerde near Ghent in Belgium, brings together several companies: two travel agency chains (Thomas Cook Travel Shop and Neckermann holiday shopping); an airline carrier (Thomas Cook Airlines) and three tour operators (Thomas Cook, Pegase and Neckermann).

Thomas Cook Belgium employs more than 600 employees at its HQ. The modern office building was constructed in 1996 and features almost 2000 square metres of windows. The building consists of three floors, with the middle floor featuring an atrium built entirely out of glass.

Hot and less comfortable

Over the years, employees working in the building had been struggling with the heat.

J Jean-Marie Baetens, Head of Infrastructure at Thomas Cook Belgium, explains: "People in the office often complained about the heat, especially during the summertime when we could experience temperatures of 30 degrees or more. It would then become unbearable to work here. Employees were suffering and it was clear that we had to take urgent steps to address the problem."

The heat problem was made worse by poor ventilation in the affected areas as well as the fact there was no air-conditioning system in every office.

Solar glare also became an issue. Employees were struggling to concentrate on their computer screens because the sunlight streaming through the windows and reflecting on their screens made it hard to read emails and other essential business documents.

Shutters not the right choice

Jean-Marie Baetens and Bert Frits, Health and Safety Officer at Thomas Cook Belgium, had looked into several solutions to these problems. For example, the company had installed shutters in the past, but this did not meet expectations. "When the weather was windy the shutters went up automatically so the problem wasn't solved. Also, external blinds such as solar screens would block sunlight so completely that we felt we were working in almost total darkness," explained Frits.

Thomas Cook Belgium was advised by glazing expert Kris Vroman of Proglass to look at various alternative solutions. After an in-depth study made by Proglass and several tests in a section of the building, Vroman recommended installing Solar Gard Silver 35, a unique window film that ensures high heat rejection (up to 61%) while maximising the visible light entering through the windows. It could also block up to 62% of solar glare, minimising the heat issues the employees were facing.

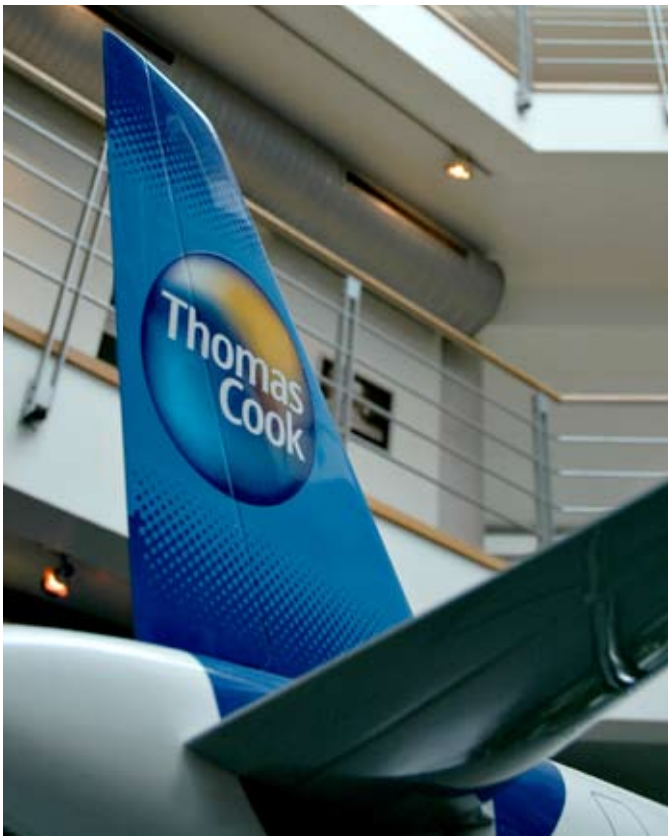
A green motive
After weighing other alternatives including shutters and air-conditioning, Thomas Cook Belgium settled on Vroman's suggestion of window film.

"We considered extra air conditioning but its installation and maintenance would have been complicated due to the shape of our building and highly disruptive to our working environment during installation. In addition, our energy consumption would have spectacularly increased, something an environmentally-conscious company like Thomas Cook Belgium tries to avoid," said Baetens.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, Thomas Cook Belgium seeks out green and environmentally-friendly alternatives when strategic business decisions need to be made. Green values such as saving energy and reducing the company's carbon footprint are very important to the company and impact all decision-making processes.

Efficient installation process
Almost 1000 square meters of window film were installed in just two weeks time. To illustrate the unobtrusive nature of installing window film, Thomas Cook Belgium employees continued their work without any disruption during this period. This was particularly important because the company had a huge call centre in the office and noisy installation could require the entire department to close down, a potentially costly prospect.

The end results have been impressive. Heat from solar gain has been significantly reduced and the office is now a comfortable and pleasurable place to work. The glare problem has disappeared entirely and employees can now read documents on their screens without eyestrain.



Baetens concludes that the installation was a success and cites the added benefit that the solution they chose, window film, is practically invisible and does not interfere with the stunning architectural design of the building.

"The results were exactly what we expected; we have a much better work environment and no longer face any employee sickness issues due to excessive heat and glare. We've already covered half the glass in the building with window film, eliminating the hotspots, and will now be considering installing window film throughout the rest of the building."