

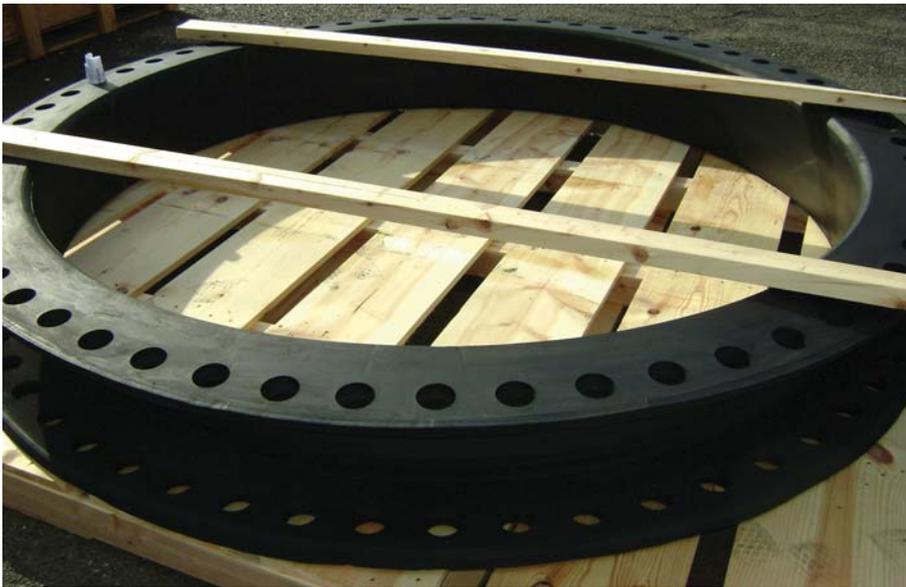


Oil rig mud pump piping

The vision and mission of Proco Products, Inc.

Founded in Stockton, California in 1984, Proco Products, Inc. has well over thirty years of experience as a manufacturer of rubber, metal, and PTFE expansion joints, flexible connectors, penetration seals, and rubber check valves for pressure piping systems. While most of their business is international and national, the company's roots in the local area are solid and Proco Products interacts with a number of domicile businesses for services and supplies. In addition to the local employment and community support in Stockton, the easy access to major highways, airports, and the Port of Stockton makes this the hometown of many of Proco Products' employees and serves as an ideal base to work from. Vision and mission are the core strengths behind the company's worldwide success. Managing Aging Plants got in contact with Rob Coffee, Vice President Sales & Marketing at Proco Products, to reflect on the company's success in the past, discuss the daily challenges, and look forward towards future projects.

By Jolanda Heunen



78 inch Proco rubber expansion joint ready for shipment to power plant

'The expansion joint and check valve people' is how the people behind Proco Products depict themselves. This indicates a no-nonsense approach that is all about solid solutions and customer satisfaction. Mr. Coffee's work on the many aspects of sales and marketing for Proco Products generally starts at 5:15 every morning. "I am usually in the office for two weeks out of the month. The rest of the time I spend out in the field working with our agents," he explains. This immediately reflects the company's philosophy of being available for the client and providing support where desired. Mr. Coffee started his career in the industry in 1979. "At first I did this part-time, starting in the mail room after high school for Pathway Bellows, a metal bellows expansion joint company, and I switched to full-time in 1986. I have been working with Proco for twenty-two years now, first as Marketing Manager, then as Sales Manager, and in my current position as Vice President Sales & Marketing since 2005."

When asked his opinion on the challenge of managing aging plants, Mr. Coffee points out that much knowledge is lost when senior employees leave for retirement. "Our industry faces an aging workforce, with valuable employees leaving a company, taking vital knowledge with them into retirement. In addition I notice that it is becoming more and more difficult to find people who are interested in entering a blue collar field career path. Reaching out to Military personnel through Transition Offices is a good way to find qualified people with a specific skill set or looking into programs such

as 'The Industrial Career Pathways (ICP)' which links students to career paths in the industrial world through partnerships with local educators and employers is a good way to find people to transition in

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this aging workforce." Mr. Coffee could not imagine doing anything else himself. "I have a job that I enjoy in an industry that is rewarding."

Solution driven customer service

The drive and enthusiasm of Mr. Coffee is exemplary for the company culture:

the secret of Proco Products' success lies in their vision and drive to become number one in the industry, and the enthusiastic mission to service their customers to the highest possible performance level. Or, as Mr. Coffee puts it: "We want to be able to exactly define what it is that our end users need and subsequently provide them with the service that fits them best. This is how we build our business, by building a relationship with our clients. We earn trust by solving problems for our customers, by thinking in solutions, and by working together on making things happen."

You don't need to be afraid of reaching an automated phone system when you call Proco Products, since the company does not work that way. Their customer service representatives answer the phone and pride themselves in servicing their client in just one call. In addition, Proco maintains over \$2 million of inventory in their warehouse to help cut down on lead times and

provide clients with the possibility of same-day order shipment. "We have a broad inventory for immediate shipments and are available from 5:30am to 5:15pm, from Monday through Friday," Mr. Coffee explains. "To accommodate for the different time zones, there is always someone available 24/7. With



Cooling tower hard piped line before retrofit with rubber expansion joint



Acid storage depot for mining operation

our experience in international sales, we have recognized this is in high demand and have become experts at arranging international shipments quickly.”

The whole process is well organized: “All manufacturing sites are running smoothly and our products are being built with the highest integrity,” Mr. Coffee explains. “All sales happen via distribution and resellers. On the project side, we are working with EPC’s who work with piping specialties packagers to distribute our products.”

Markets and distribution

The products that Proco develop and manufacture typically do not require any field service. However, when desired, both Proco Products and their authorized representatives are always available for inspection services. “Our products can be offered not only as a stand-alone item, but also as part of a complete solution,” Mr. Coffee tells. “The way that is chosen depends on whether the product is a replacement item or a new build system. On an engineering front, a selection of our catalogue products are available on the ‘Trace Parts Online’ service for download.”

Trace Parts Online is one of the biggest CAD part libraries in the world, offering over a hundred million free 2D and 3D CAD models. The presence of Proco Products, Inc. in this online catalogue offers a valuable resource for their clients, full of technical and design information for the implementation

of piping applications. Via the online service, several series of standard Proco products – such as the 230, 240/242, and 271 series expansion joints – are available for downloading in

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various CAD formats, such as AutoCAD, SolidWorks, and ProE, enabling engineers and end-users to create CAD Models or 3D PDF data sheets of expansion joints for use in their design

specification. For more information: www.tracepartsonline.net/ws/proco. Regarding the markets that Proco Products serve, Mr. Coffee tells: “We are active in all markets that convey fluids or solids piping. To name but a few of the industries that we serve: Power Generation, Oil & Gas, Water and Wastewater, Mining, the Chemical and Petrochemical industry, Food Processing, Pulp & Paper, Steel, and Offshore.” The products that Proco develop and manufacture are of vital importance in all of these industries, and they make sure that aging facilities can stay productive, in a safe and efficient way.

“It is important to remember that Proco – with the help of its agents and distribution partners – can come in to an aging plant and do surveys of expansion joints in systems, trouble shoot problem areas and provide solutions to improve reliability of such piping systems,” Mr. Coffee states. “We use distribution to sell our products and we also work with OEM’s and EPC’s (Engineer Procure Constructors). End users can always

contact us for engineering and product selection; we offer a back-up service to our customers, in order for engineering and on-site assistance to always be available when required.”



Cooling inlet



Phosphorus recovery pump inlet and outlet system

Challenges and trends

"I think the biggest challenge Proco Products face at this moment is the uncertainty surrounding the elections," Mr. Coffee tells. "We are in a period in which we are waiting for a new government and the future strategy that will be set out for the country. This will be directive for us, with respect to how we proceed with projects that are in queue." Mr. Coffee also sees environmental challenges as an important issue, not only for Proco Products, but for the industry as a whole. "End users and customers are constantly making a lot of effort in reaching compliance with frequently changing regulations." When asked what kind of end-user issues Proco Products encounter regularly, Mr. Coffee tells: "Piping systems continually change when in a plant environment. It is sometimes an issue of getting the right information from an end user on changes to the system so the engineer can provide solutions to mechanical issues." Mr. Coffee also provides one simple but effective tip to help companies improve plant performance: "Expansion joints can be misused and it is important to review Installation & Operation Maintenance Manuals to improve the performance of the product." A trend that Mr. Coffee notices in the industry concerns the contraction of industrial business in North America. "We see the technological advances of products such as new expansion joint designs, SolidWorks, sensors and finite element analysis which are improving

the life of our products in piping systems." Being a part of the Fluid Sealing Association, Proco has played an integral part in bringing new designs to market, which is helping to solve piping

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problems in aging plants. "Solid Works has allowed us to provide excellent submittals and with our partnership with TraceParts we can allow plant personnel to download our catalogue designs



Duckbill check valve for tank overflow at water facility. Source images: Proco Products.

for consideration," he explains. "We see that sensors are being used more and more in plants, making them more efficient. And I can see that sensors will someday be added to expansion joints to better determine when a unit should be replaced, which will dramatically improve reliability. Finite element analysis can help determine wear patterns or heat patterns which will also improve performance of our products."

Steady growth

Proco Products is proactive in identifying potential future markets and finding ways to serve those markets. "We currently work with MENA (Middle East and North Africa) nations through a global network of agents to seek out important work needing expansion joints," Mr. Coffee tells. "Another emerging market that we are researching at the moment is Battery Technology. We think it could be interesting for us because we feel Proco Products would be adding value by working with companies in this market to improve their design." Maintaining a competitive position

seems to come naturally for Proco Products. Their proactive approach keeps their knowledge up-to-date and enables the company to adapt quickly and effectively in changing circumstances. Governmental regulations can cause some markets to retract, while others may flourish or emerge. Identifying and entering emerging markets keeps growth opportunities high so business can always continue. Steadily, without compromising. "Our motto is 'One end user at a time,'" Mr. Coffee concludes.

Proco Products is member of a number of trade organizations, such as NAHAD, AWWA, WEF, CTI and FSA. Mr. Coffee currently holds board positions for both the FSA (Fluid Sealing Association) and NAHAD (National Association of Hose & Accessories Distributors). Each Association is instrumental in the promotion of industrial products that affect our daily lives.