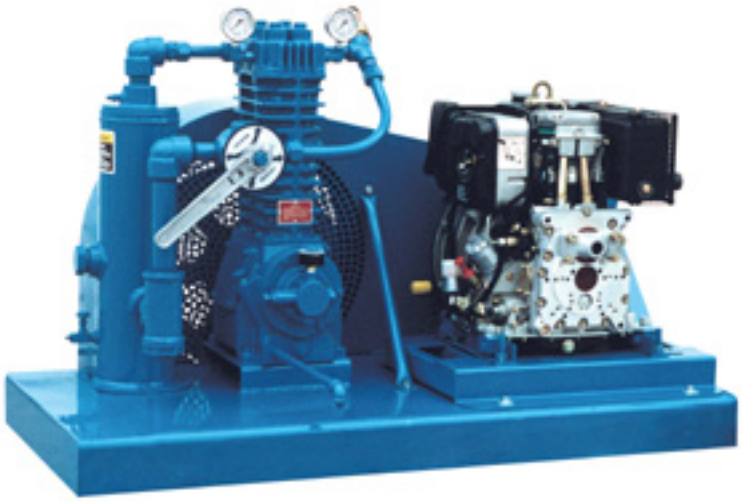
Optimizing Propane Recovery & Profit



Bluhms Gas Sales of Laceyville, PA has been supplying propane to residential and commercial customers in northeastern Pennsylvania since 1965. In this capacity, Bluhms has a network of LPG tanks in the field. When these tanks need to be repaired or have parts upgraded, they are brought into the shop where any residual gas in them is purged before any repairs or upgrades can begin.

In the days when propane was relatively inexpensive and the effects these emissions could potentially have on the environment were less well-known, not much attention was paid to the lost vapors. However, as the cost of propane continues to increase and the harm purged vapors can do to the atmosphere is more recognized, the management of Bluhms came to the conclusion that the purging process was one that could not be continued.

“Our problem was that for the past 20 years in the process of changing valves and repairing tanks that have some gas in them we had to manually flip the tank upside-down and transfer the product to an empty ASME tank,” explained Greg Smith, operations manager for Bluhms Gas Sales. “To do that, we had to balance the pressure, and when the tank was finally drained, we had to burn the tank off to get rid of the pressure, which was a long process. As the cost of fuel went crazy, $2 or $3 a gallon, when we were burning or blowing the tanks off we were losing so much propane that we realized we needed another solution.”

For that solution, Bluhms turned to Ray Murray Inc., a distributor of propane-gas equipment and appliances headquartered in Bensalem, PA. Working with Mark Wenik, Ray Murray's product manager of plant and industrial equipment, Bluhms decided to install a new propane vapor-recovery system with an LB Series reciprocating gas compressor from Blackmer® as the new system's centerpiece. Since the installation of the LB compressor, which is designed to deliver high efficiency in handling propane and vapor-recovery applications, Bluhms has pumped more than 40,000 gallons of propane back to a storage tank, where it can be resold.

"We've actually been able to increase profits, not only in recovering lost gas, but in bringing gas back that was cheaper when we purchased it and selling it at a higher price," said Smith. "This is the best investment we've made in a long time for plant equipment. It not only saves us money on one end, but it also makes us money on the other."

Projects like these show how Blackmer products have been designed to meet the company's commitment to sustainability, which is at the core of its mission. In fact, Blackmer has created products, such as its LB Series reciprocating gas compressors, to provide end-users with solutions that enable them to reduce energy consumption and preserve natural resources.

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