Q&A: Safety on the (Clothes) Line

Food Manufacturing Magazine

Interview with Gary Zumstein, VP of Research & Development, Protective, Glen Raven Technical Fabrics, LLC, and William Roger McKee, National Account Executive, FR Specialist, G&K Services

Manufacturing is one of the most dangerous industries around, but safety can be greatly improved by taking basic measures — one of the simplest being providing workers with protective clothing. Food Manufacturing spoke with Gary Zumstein of Glen Raven Technical Fabrics and Roger McKee of G&K Services about how clothing and other safety apparel can help protect food manufacturers on the job.

Q: Against what types of hazards can industrial protective clothing protect?

McKee: Industrial protective clothing can offer electrical arc, flash flame and chemical splash protection. The garments most needed are garments that meet NFPA 70E and Electric Arc Safety requirements.

Q: What types of fabric are most effective at protecting worker safety in food manufacturing facilities?

Zumstein: Fabrics which not only withstand the rigors of food manufacturing, such as cleaning agents, but offer maximum protections for the life of the garment tend to provide the best protection.

Q: How well do protective fabrics perform when it comes to preventing

industrial injuries?

Zumstein: Protective fabrics are tested to assure they not only meet but exceed industry standards to protect wearers from hazards in the workplace. The key aspect is how well the garments and fabrics are maintained throughout the life cycle. An industrial laundry not only cleans the garments properly but makes needed repairs along with taking garments out of service when they no longer offer the proper protection.

McKee: More than 2,000 burn injuries are reported every year. Flame resistant clothing can reduce the possibility of a second degree burn by 50 percent.

Q: How does the development process for a protective fabric work?

Zumstein: The development process for protective fabrics is a work in process as innovative technology and increased protection requirements change. Over the last five years there has been significant increase of various protective fabrics being introduced into the market, both domestically and abroad. These new fabrics, which are comprised of components from all over the world, offer a range of features including increased protection, comfort and durability. Suppliers of protective fabrics are listening to the market and making products which meet the demands of various working environments with a single fabric solution.

Once those new fabric solutions are introduced into the market then it is up to the end user to determine if the fabric meets and exceeds their expectations. Fabric solutions must meet various industry standards such as NFPA 70-E and NFPA 2112, but comfort is critical to assure the wearers are happy with a product that is there to protect them. Unhappy wearers are less likely to wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) properly and are less productive on the job. New products have to take into account all aspects in the industry, not just meeting certain protection guidelines.

McKee: Fabrics are tested as outlined in ASTM (American Society for Testing Materials) standards. Fabric weight, the ability of the fabric to shield the energy from the skin and the ability to self-extinguish varies from fabric to fabric.

Q: What should manufacturers look for when selecting protective apparel?

McKee: All garments should be labeled with the ASTM Test performed, and what NFPA standard the garment meets. A wear test is recommended to judge the comfort and durability.

Zumstein: Manufacturers are looking for various properties when selecting protective apparel:

Protection

- This certainly one of the most important properties a manufacturer is

looking for in protective apparel. The protective apparel should offer maximum protection for the life of the garment.
- Garment and fabric should be certified to meet the established industry standards.
- Manufacturers should make their own assessment of what level of protection is needed.
- Choose the right product for the application.
- Does the product meet “Fitness For Use?”

Product Integrity

- Industrial laundry service provides a level of protection to the end user by assuring garments are maintained properly and repaired or taken out of service when needed.
- Quality of garments: It is critical that garments are made to industry standards and there is no compromising. Using the best fabrics, sewing thread, button, zippers and garment construction is critical in protecting a worker on the job.
- Longevity: How well the garments are made and the fabrics selected are very important in how they perform in the field.

Accountability

- What supply chain is in place for the apparel manufacturer?
- Do they have all documents for industry standards? Ask for copies.
- Are their suppliers there for them if a problem occurs in the workplace?
- Traceability of product throughout the supply chain?
- Key is having a support team in place on which you can rely if problems do happen so you are not out there alone.

Comfort

- How well they like the product once they begin wearing it is important.
- If they do not wear it properly then protection can be compromised. The wearers should be part of the decision making as only then there is a buy in from all parties.

Price cannot be the only consideration in choosing the right protective apparel product. There are many choices available today, providing everyone with the right product for the application. Price, cost per use, comfort, level of protection and accountability all have to be considered in making the right decision in protecting the lives of their employees.

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