

Industrial Maintenance Deferred



Atlas Copco is an industrial group with world-leading positions in compressors, construction and mining equipment, power tools and assembly systems. The company is also the sponsor of *Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation's (IMPO's)* inaugural Maintenance Professional of the Year Award. Atlas Copco's Paul Humphreys talks with *IMPO* about the worrying maintenance trends we've seen since the downturn — and how we can fix them.

Q: Why does Atlas Copco see itself as a leader in the industrial maintenance realm?

A: Atlas Copco places a huge emphasis on sustainability, not just in the products we engineer, manufacture and sell, but also in the ways in which we conduct business around the globe. The Atlas Copco Group was named tenth among the Top 100 sustainable companies in the world, and has been recognized by Forbes, Thomson-Reuters and Newsweek, among others, for our commitment to innovation and sustainability.

And because proper maintenance is such a key to sustainable operations, we naturally have a strong interest in the subject matter.

We also take great pride in our service team that conducts maintenance on our machines in all types of facilities. We see firsthand, on a daily basis, the benefit regular and routine maintenance procedures provide in efficiency, reduced costs and increased uptime.

Q: Earlier this year, you spoke with us about the risk of the deferred maintenance that you've seen escalating since the economic downturn. Why would you caution plant management against deferring maintenance? Why is this a critical investment even when cash is tight?

A: Deferring maintenance, not just on compressors, but across industrial equipment in general, is one of the more worrying trends we've seen the past few years in manufacturing due to challenging economic conditions. When companies make these tough decisions, they are forced to live with the associated risks. However, there are manufacturers on the other end of the spectrum too — companies that keep pushing and migrating to more sustainable manufacturing practices, utilizing new technologies to offset energy costs and ensuring that their machinery is always running in peak condition. The companies that invest today will be in better shape tomorrow — the same goes with maintenance; if you ignore maintenance it will almost always cost you more in the end.

We work with some companies in the U.S. in which the maintenance manager is also in charge of the corporate energy-savings programs, so he can see the fruits of his labor going straight to the bottom line, and it makes maintenance a profit center and not just a cost center.

Q: How has Atlas Copco reacted to this industry-wide problem of deferred maintenance? How does the company hope to contribute to the solution?

A: One thing we're doing is working hard to draw more attention to the subject and importance of maintenance — by sponsoring the Maintenance Professional of the Year program, for example. Too often, maintenance is seen as unimportant or insignificant to a facility's processes, but we see it as a key ingredient to remaining successful, driving down costs and increasing uptime.

Atlas Copco also provides compressed air and related equipment service that gives manufacturers the peace of mind that their air systems are always running at full efficiency. But, compressed air is just one piece of the puzzle. We all have to work together to achieve the best results for every facility.

The focus is also on manufacturers to be able to demonstrate that quality, proactive maintenance makes financial sense and there are a variety of tools now used in the marketplace to demonstrate the costs of a clogged filter or a faulty element over time, not to mention the costs associated with unplanned downtime to repair a fault.

Q: How can an increased emphasis on training and employee development ultimately keep efficiency up and long-term costs down?

A: According to the U.S. Department of Energy, compressed air accounts for 10 percent of all electricity use in U.S. manufacturing. By most assessments, even the most efficient compressed air system ultimately delivers 10 to 15 percent of all energy input as compressed air. When combined with leaks, inefficient design,

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incorrect uses and poor maintenance, that totals more than \$3.2 billion annually in wasted energy use in the United States.

And this is just compressed air. Look around any facility and see the plethora of opportunities for increased efficiency. Only properly trained professionals will know where to look and how to solve these problems in the most effective manner for your business.

For example, little things like a single quarter-inch air leak can cost a company more than \$2,500 a year. If there isn't awareness of this in the market, these types of leaks, combined with improper uses, can go unnoticed for years — costing a company hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Q: Atlas Copco was instrumental in helping develop the 2012 Maintenance Professional of the Year Award. What types of qualities do you anticipate we'll see from this year's winners (to be announced in our July issue)? Besides the prize package, what other reasons would you cite to urge our readers to participate?

A: In our experience, the best maintenance professionals exhibit ingenuity, resourcefulness, determination and a broad knowledge base. They are also in a position in which the better they do their job, the less they are noticed. We wanted to create this award to give maintenance professionals their moment in the spotlight and honor the critical work they do every day to keep our manufacturing facilities running at peak efficiency.

IMPO will be accepting nominations for the 2012 Maintenance Professional of the Year Award until May 15th. This is a great opportunity to reward the hardest working employees in your facility with a cool prize package and some much-needed recognition for a job well done. To nominate a colleague, visit www.research.net/s/maintpro [1]. The first-place winner will receive a \$500 Visa Gift Card, an iPad, a 283-piece tool chest, work boots, a Jawbone Bluetooth Speaker and official Atlas Copco work gear. Second- and third-place winners will each receive a \$200 Visa Gift Card, a 283-piece tool chest, work boots, a Jawbone Bluetooth Speaker and official Atlas Copco work gear.

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