



Pacific Propane's New Security, Safety Features Raise the Bar

Moving one's business to a new location seems to produce a mixed bag of conflicting emotions—overwhelmed and anxious by the packing and moving process; stressed out and nervous about the change and the unpacking—but looking forward to the new location. At the same time, the business must continue to operate. Throw in the stress and tension of building a new facility while preparing to pack up and it's a wonder that any company or its owners and managers ever move.

But that's what the owners of Monterey County, Calif.-based Pacific Propane did last year. Founded by Paula and Maskey Heath in 1988, Pacific Propane management and employees spent months working out the details for their new, larger, state-of-the-art headquarters and bulk facility while preparing to leave the rural, coastal location in Moss Landing, Calif. they had been leasing. Despite the numerous challenges, they gladly welcomed the opportunity to design and build their new facility from the ground up.

The company's new headquarters in Castroville took about 19 comparatively uneventful months to complete after clearing escrow and getting building permits. Located about four miles southeast of its original plant, Pacific Propane was ready to open the gates to its new facility in February 2007.

Bryan Heath, vice president of Pacific Propane and the Heaths' son, said the company continues to maintain a 26,000-gal. storage at its former Moss

Landing location. The site may one day become a seawater desalinization plant local government officials expect will be built in the near future as a solution to water shortages in the area. The county's decision to pursue the desalinization project prompted Pacific Propane's move.

Designed to meet their specific needs, the state-of-the-art facility was built on a vacant 1.8-acre parcel in a fairly new commercial area and includes 120,000 gal. of storage, an office building, two bobtail loading stations that can operate simultaneously, and one transport unloading dock. Corken pumps and RegO valves and fittings were incorporated in the installation, including two 3-in. 1021 Coro-Vane pumps in the bobtail loading area. Bobtails can load in about 20 minutes. The loading stations also feature quarter-turn valves by Todo AB (Toreboda, Sweden) to restrict fugitive emissions.

Among the security and safety upgrades to the design were redundant heat-sensing wires on each 60,000-gal. tank made by Trinity Containers (Dallas). The heat sensing wires were part of a security system connected to an alarm designed by Protectowire Fire Systems (Plymouth, Mass.). The wires were installed along the flanks and around the ends of each tank. The system activates elevated water cannons if heat at a certain temperature is detected. "The Protectowire system is heat sensitive to 190°F or more of direct heat," Heath explained. "There are two messenger wires on each tank, one slightly above and the other slightly below the center line. They run around the entire length and ends of the tanks."

There are also five remote manual emergency plant shutdowns designed to close all valves and turn off all pumps in the event of fire. The shut-down system is also automatically activated via the





sensing wires on the tanks. The fenced, lighted complex includes electronic gates with key code access and surveillance cameras.

Fire officials initially tried to limit the facility to just 100,000 gal. of propane storage, citing the building density in the area, which is surrounded by farmland on the west and new housing and commercial developments on the east. The closest homes are about a half a mile away. Following lengthy negotiations, the concerns of fire officials and company operating requirements were eventually reconciled. "The code can be ambiguous," Heath cautioned, "and the fire marshal has a lot of authority on how it is interpreted." He noted that not all jurisdictions adopt the code.

In addition to its own fire suppression system and the alarm-connected heat-sensing wires installed on the tanks, Pacific Propane installed two push-button alarms that directly alert the local fire department to also help satisfy fire officials' concerns.

The plant was designed and constructed by Teeco Products' (Irvine, Calif.) Engineering, Design & Construction Division to meet the international Fire Code Article 82 specification, which governs LPG storage, use, handling, and dispensing that California recently adopted and went into force Jan. 1. A local firm, Ausonio Construction of Castroville, built Pacific Propane's 4000-sq-ft office building and also poured the piers for the two storage tanks per specification from Trinity. The building houses a conference room, lobby, driver's office, utility room, lunch room, maintenance area, and open and enclosed office areas.

The project marked a number of firsts for Teeco, according to Paul Connelly, director of engineering. These included the installation of a Tuthill Corp. (Burr Ridge, Ill.) electronic flow meter on the dispenser with an additional remote register head located in the office. Personnel working inside are able to see how much propane is being pumped for each sale. In addition, the RegO multi-port relief valves can be swapped out without emptying the tanks, he said. "They decided to go with the latest and best technology. This is one of the most beautiful plants I've ever been involved with. No expense was spared."

"We have had a long-term relationship with Teeco," noted company VP Heath, "and everything in this plant is industry standard. They worked with us on the research and design, and hooked us up with the wholesalers." He added that the decision to have two 60,000-gal. tanks rather than a four 30,000-gal. configuration was to reduce plumbing needed for the system. The two 90-ft-long tanks were manufactured in Trin-

ity's plant in Northern Mexico before being transported to Castroville.

Heath said it took 19 months to complete the building project, starting from when the vacant ground cleared escrow and building permits were received. While declining to state a specific amount, he acknowledged that the investment to build the company's new headquarters and bulk plant represented "a significant sum." "We were fortunate that the county permit and approval process went fairly smoothly," he noted.

Bob Bailey, Teeco's vice president of operations, had high praise for the new facility. "Everything is top of the line," he enthused "The controls in the plant go beyond what is required for 2011 compliance."

With its new 60,000-gal. storage tanks emblazoned with the company name and cresting ocean-wave logo, Pacific Propane hosted a grand opening celebration in June. The event featured an appearance by child advocate Marc Klass, whose daughter, Polly, was murdered in 1993, and free fingerprinting services to about 150 area children who were in attendance. In addition, Pacific Propane held a fund-raiser for Relay for Life, an organization that works to support the American Cancer Society. Local fire officials were also on hand, and police brought the department's D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) car to the event.

Pacific Propane operates five bob-tails that serve an area covering about a 60-mile radius around Castroville. The company has both residential and commercial accounts. —John Needham

