

Viewpoint:Turning Challenges Into Successes

Written by Steve Harman, President, Shell Lubricants, Americas
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One of the primary roles of maintenance and reliability professionals is to run their plant profitably at peak capacity while operating safely and efficiently. As plant professionals strive for increases in production, few would put lubrication at the top of their list of ways to increase plant performance. However, failing to identify the optimal lubricant for an application can lead to decreased efficiency, increased maintenance and the most menacing word of all, “downtime.”

There are roughly 26,000 applications for lubricants in the United States, and each application requires specific performance from its lubricant. Base Oil (mineral versus synthetic), viscosity, additive package, oxidation resistance and thermal stability, are just a few of the characteristics that must be considered when choosing a lubricant.

Identifying the correct lubricant can be a daunting task, especially when faced with all of the other dynamics that impact plant performance. Our own maintenance and reliability staff handles these same issues at the Shell Houston Lubricant Plant, which runs 13 production lines for packaging. The plant can process quart and gallon bottles, pails and drums simultaneously. At a rate of 18,000 quarts per hour, each line is integral to our lubricants business. Letting those lines go down for just a single hour can have a significant impact on production, greatly affecting our customers.

No matter how well developed a production plan is, problems will inevitably arise. The best companies are the ones that can prevent minor problems from developing into very expensive ones. Knowing how efficiency affects our business helps us understand yours. As a result, we work hard to align our entire business around delivering growth and quality customer support.

Your success is our success

At Shell, we believe our success comes from helping our customers succeed, so we work

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closely with them to develop insight into their businesses. We ensure that we have an intimate understanding of their challenges and goals. Once that foundation has been created, our team begins a customer “deep dive” to identify the customer’s particular needs.

Some of our customers have very intense requirements—onsite maintenance, technical service, new technologies, research and development, the whole package. Companies with multiple facilities often have very specific needs and depend upon 24-hour-a-day reliable service. As downtime can potentially lead to lost revenue, it is important for reliability professionals to identify the lubricants that meet the demands of their machinery and help keep them running efficiently.

Regardless of plant size, maintenance and reliability professionals should take advantage of the services lubricants companies can provide. As facilities are pressured to perform more efficiently with fewer resources, it is beneficial to employ experts who can help you make the most informed lubricant decisions. By reviewing plant equipment applications and operating conditions, suppliers can develop customized lubrication programs that help your facilities work more efficiently.

A lubricants company can provide diverse resources that are not always at hand for most maintenance professionals. For instance, fiber optic video inspection can often save plants time and money by inspecting internal components without dismantling the equipment itself. Some suppliers can also do in-depth fluid and equipment analysis to alert them to conditions that lead to premature equipment failure.

Ultimately, selecting the right lubricants and applying them correctly can have a big impact on your plant’s productivity and total operations cost. World-class lubricants companies are capable of delivering value-added services that support maintenance and reliability professionals in their efforts to deliver superior results. Make the most of your lubricants supplier relationship by asking what they can do to help optimize your business. **MT**