



Hazard Concerns Motivate Green Gas

It has long been an accepted fact of life in the propane business that the purging of propane storage or transport tanks—whether for their maintenance, refurbishment, end-of-life disposal, or after an accident—results in small amounts of propane either escaping, being burned off, or venting into the atmosphere. However, as the price of propane continues to escalate and the regulatory eye of such bodies as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) focuses more and more on the venting process, propane handlers and retailers are looking for economical ways to recover and reuse these vapors. One way to contain and control these fugitive vapors is an enhanced vapor-recovery system.

“What we’re seeing is that when the price of propane spiked, it increased the interest in vapor-recovery systems,” explains Mark Wenik, Product Manager, Plant and Industrial Equipment for Ray Murray, Inc., a distributor of propane-gas equipment and appliances headquartered in Bensalem, PA. “At \$2 a gallon, there’s more incentive to invest in a recovery system than

when it’s less than a dollar a gallon. With the economy the way it is, every dollar saved is significant and every gallon recovered is another gallon you don’t have to buy.

“Also, what we’re seeing is that a lot of bulk plants were originally in industrial or commercial areas with very few neighbors. Now, there is an encroachment of industries and businesses around the bulk plants. Before, a marketer could vent gas without issue. Now, the neighbors complain about smelling gas when a tank is being vented or blown down and they’re concerned about it being a hazard.”

One of the companies that has taken note of the shifting landscape in regards to propane emissions and also identified the inherent value in recovering vapors is Hydrostat, Inc., Rice, MN. In business since 1999, Hydrostat is a hydrostatic tester and re-qualifier of industrial cylinders with the capability to inspect, test, and recondition a wide variety of cylinders, among them propane. In the wake of a recent plant expansion, and knowing that continued propane emissions could not be tolerated, Hydrostat turned to Ray Murray for a solution to the propane it was losing during the tank-reconditioning process.

The decision was made to install a 10-rack vapor-recovery system that features LB Series Reciprocating Gas Compressors from Blackmer®. The oil-free compressors are perfect for the job because they have been designed to deliver high efficiency in handling propane and are ideal for vapor-recovery applications. Following this upgrade, rather than blowing gas into the atmosphere and wasting it, the recovered propane is now transferred into a 1,990-gallon tank that’s piped right into the facility’s makeup air and heating system. This now allows Hydrostat to use the recovered propane to help heat its headquarters.

Recovering the propane and reusing it for heating purposes was such a unique aspect of the project that it was deemed an environmentally friendly “green” project by Benton County, MN, the home of Hydrostat. This allowed the company to qualify for a state grant that covered 50 percent of the project’s cost.

“The county approached us and said it had grant money available for recycling,” explains Stacy Schraut, Owner of Hydrostat. “They reviewed our application, I made a presentation to the board and told them, No. 1, this helps the environment, No. 2, we’re recycling propane and, No. 3, we’re conserving energy because we won’t be using natural gas to heat the building. After that, they came back and said the project qualified for the grant money.

“The entire project for us, overall, was really a no-brainer,” Schraut continues. “We had all these cylinders coming in with product left in them. We crunched the numbers and found that we could pay back the system in just 18 months based on our recovered natural gas. With the grant from Benton County, the actual payback is now less than 12 months.”

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