



Simple Math

Drives Distributor's Entry into Gas Filling

Look out southern Indiana, there's a new gas filler in town. Koehler Welding and Supply, a leading supplier of welding, maintenance/repair and other industrial products since 1929, now has expanded their services to include high-pressure-gas and liquid-cylinder filling.

With detailed planning and execution support from Weldcoa, Koehler launched its filling operations during the summer of 2014, and has seen significant growth in its gas business since—with existing customers and new. *"It came down to simple math,"* said Koehler president and owner Dave Ungru, explaining why the firm decided to move most of its filling operations away from long-time provider Indiana Oxygen, 100 miles away in Indianapolis. *"What I was spending annually on new tanks and transportation I figured I could use to invest in our own fill plant."*

Ungru points to a 50 to 60 percent boost in gas sales since 2010, primarily fueled by the industrial and construction markets, as another factor in his decision.

Outside Advice and Support

Ungru notes they had the full support of Indiana Oxygen for their new venture. The two companies remain business partners in some gas market segments, and, in fact, management at Indiana Oxygen recommended that Ungru call on the expertise of Weldcoa.

"Don Renner (Weldcoa Sales Engineering Manager) in particular worked with us from the beginning, late in 2013, to develop a layout for the fill systems and define the equipment we would need," Ungru said. *"We wanted to fill oxygen, nitrogen, argon, CO2, and argon mixes."* Another key area Renner helped Ungru address was exactly where to locate the new fill systems. Avoiding any disruption to Koehler's complex and very heavy flow of goods moving to and from its product warehouse was a priority.

"We are heavy in industrial supplies," Ungru said. *"There are 10 to 12 semi-trailers moving in and out of here daily; we average 600,000 items shipped per month. With the new fill systems, we had to ensure we steered clear of those shipping and receiving operations, and Don and his Weldcoa team helped us accomplish that goal."*

Also in on the planning and execution of the new fill systems were Koehler sales personnel Todd Ungru and Teresa Moore, who also oversees daily operations and helps move orders through the production and delivery process. Echoing Dave Ungru's beliefs, Moore said: *"Weldcoa was very instrumental in the success of this project. Before we poured an ounce of concrete, Don helped us understand the options we had in terms of the equipment and layout. At Don's suggestion, we even had the door to the warehouse offset to ease forklift traffic. This layout also helps with cylinder staging and minimizes cylinder handling, reducing manual-labor costs."*



To learn more call Weldcoa at 630.806.2000. Visit Weldcoa.com.

In-House Filling Operation

Koehler's new fill plant includes two traversing manifolds (one inert/mix and the other O2), as well as liquid-fill manifold stations for LO2, LN2, liquid argon and CO2 cylinders were installed in one corner of a new 12,000-sq.-ft. warehouse built on the Koehler site. The new warehouse nearly doubled Koehler's storage capacity.

The fill island is designed to allow Koehler's 3 trained employees to bring pallets up to the deck and roll the cylinders off onto the deck for filling. On opposite ends of the island are the operator control panels—the O2 control panel on one end and a four-gas mix control panel on the opposite end. Each control panel includes a vacuum pump assembly tucked underneath; the mix panel also includes a cabinet with scale and reference cylinder to fill mixtures by weight. And, along with liquid manifold stations and scales, Weldcoa provided pumps and vaporizers on the tank pad.



"The system will take up to 64 bottles at one time (four 18-bottle racks), and we can fill two gases simultaneously," said Todd Ungru. "It's a really nice, compact system that fulfills our needs now and also allows us to grow over the next several years. While we're not really trying to compete with the big guys on every job, on certain jobs it puts us on a level playing field, and in many ways gives us an advantage in terms of flexibility and responsiveness to the immediate needs of customers."

"It was simple math. What I was spending annually on new tanks and transportation back and forth to our supplier could be invested in our own fill plant."

Dave Ungru, Owner and President
Koehler Welding and Supply

From Zero Experience to Full Production

Since no one at Koehler had previous experience with filling, after equipment installation training became job one. *"The design of the system made it very easy to learn,"* said Moore. *"The guys we hired to run the plant were able to grasp its operation very well and very quickly, considering this was all new to them. Following three days or so of training by Weldcoa, it only took 2 to 3 weeks before they became completely comfortable and able to meet customer expectations for quality and delivery."*

Of course, the support of Renner and others at Weldcoa during startup played a major role in the project's success. *"We had several questions come up during ramp-up,"* Moore continued, *"and our crew had no problem picking up the phone and calling Weldcoa directly. For example, when we had questions about the CO2 heater, Don immediately diagnosed the problem over the phone and helped us move back into production in no time. And, when more serious issues arose, such as a problem with the safety valves on the CO2 tanks, Don was here in a matter of hours to help us work through them."*

The ROI

With its array of current customers ready to rely on Koehler more than ever for their gas needs, and new customers lining up, Dave Ungru expects a 6 to 7 year return on investment from his new fill systems.

Todd Ungru added: *"That ROI will result from our ability be the small guy that can offer great service, and now can compete with the bigger guys, thanks to our new fill capabilities. Just recently, a customer needed eight cylinders filled and delivered that same day. If we'd received a call like that prior to installing the new fill systems, we would have had to drive to Indianapolis to get the product from our vendor, and then drive it to the customer. Instead, we were able to fill and deliver in a matter of a couple of hours, without the added transportation costs or delays."*



Koehler Welding and Supply successfully brings filling in-house with the expertise of Weldcoa.