

Proco Products continues to be the rubber expansion joint leader in availability

Proco Products, Inc. prides itself on maintaining one of the largest stocks of product in North America. In addition to this, the company has an extensive presence in every market segment as well as a key involvement in a number of industry organizations. Pump Engineer had the pleasure of speaking with Rob Coffee, Vice President Sales and Marketing, where he discussed Proco's large inventory, new marketing initiatives and focus on customer service.

By Deirdre Morgan, Editor



Proco Products, Inc. is headquartered in Stockton, California, USA.

Proco was founded in 1984 by Gene Johnson and Merv Vater. After many years in the business, Gene began working for a company called Protective Coatings, which was the private label expansion joint manufacturer for Uniroyal when Uniroyal divested themselves of certain product lines; one being expansion joints. Uniroyal was the inventor of the rubber expansion joint in the 1930s, meaning Proco has a line dating back to the original inventor of the expansion joint. Gene convinced Merv to come into business with him and so they bought the assets of Protective Coatings and Proco Products was established. "Gene was a dynamic marketing guy and it was his dream to have a large inventory of expansion joints with sizes ranging from 1 inch



Founders of Proco Products, Inc., Gene Johnson & Merv Vater.



ProFlex™ Style 730 Sleeved Rubber Check Valve.

in diameter through 72 inch in diameter. When a distributor called looking for a part for the end user that they were working with, there was always something on the shelf that could be sent to the field immediately. This goal drove Proco's success as an inventory specialist," says Rob.

An inventory specialist providing superior service to a demanding marketplace

Having an inventory of sizes ranging from 1 inch in diameter through 72 inch in diameter, in Rob's opinion, has transformed the industry. People recognize Proco as the rubber expansion joint leader in availability, with a goal to be a supreme marketing company that also sells expansion joints. Inventory was in place on day 1 of the Proco beginning and they have been selling that way ever since. Today, they have an inventory of products hovering around USD \$2 million. In addition to this, Proco has an extensive agent/distributor network and sells more than 65 per cent of their products through the distribution channels. As time has gone on from the inception of Proco, the company has developed a project business, working closely with EPCs (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) for large capital projects. "While we primarily sell through distribution, that doesn't mean that we don't work with engineers, contractors, EPCs and end users because invariably, all of these customers are calling us. We are always asking end users, "Who do you buy from?" If they don't have a distributor they're currently dealing with, we can refer a distributor that we deal with on a regular basis in their particular geographic location. I think we're really in tune with making sure we take care of our customers because that's our main goal. Customers are everything to us," explains Rob. Opening at 5.30 am Pacific Time, there is always someone available to speak to the



Style 232 & 233 open and filled arch expansion joints w/limit rods.

customer. When a client calls Proco they know they are going to be speaking with somebody who will help them with their needs. Furthermore, the call goes straight to the customer service department, eliminating the need for an operator. Most companies don't operate that way but Proco believes in valuing the customer.

Proco's main company values and core mission statement is to provide quality durable products at fair prices and have a large inventory to support distribution. Being a marketing company, Proco places a key focus on being known throughout the world, ensuring they serve all market areas. "We are everywhere and continue to build our network overseas. That's not just because of the products we have to offer, but also our marketing prowess. We work directly out of the US office but we have agents in various places around the world, whether it's in India, the Middle East, Turkey, Russia, Poland, Australia – we are everywhere." When asked how Proco maintains this global presence and continues its vast network of communication, Rob explains: "We are always serving the various industries and that's how we get better brand awareness. Some people don't see the value in trade shows but we have the opposite opinion. We see that value and that's how we've grown our name throughout the world."



Proco offers the most complete line of products to suit your needs.





Expansion joints and pumps go hand-in-hand

Proco is primarily an expansion joint company offering rubber spool type joints, PTFE lined expansion joints and ducting expansion joints. Since then, they've added product lines that cater to the water & wastewater treatment segment, such as duckbill rubber check valves and piping penetration seals. As well as the water & wastewater industry thriving, the improvement in the oil and gas sector drives other market segments, much to the delight of Proco.

Most Proco Products rubber expansion joints would typically be found in and around pumps, and are essentially in every market. When there is a pump that is pumping fluids or solids, there will be an expansion joint installed at the end of that pump. An expansion joint isolates the pump from potential thermal growth of a pipe system, absorbing the pipe growth and keeping the stress of the pipe growth from affecting the internal mechanical seals or bearings of the pump. Without an expansion joint, the strain from the pipe growth is put back into a pump causing wear of those internal components, which can cause pump downtime. If a valve closes prematurely and there is a pressure surge, the expansion joint will help to alleviate that surge in

“To continue to serve our customers well, we must ensure that we are always exploring, always in contact with those who are designing new systems, and giving them the best information that we can.”

Rob Coffee

a pumping system. Hence, the expansion joint is there to protect the pump. “The expansion joint is a product that’s designed to take the “hit”. If there is an event in a pipe system, do you want your pump to fail or do you want the expansion joint to fail?” asks Rob. “You want the expansion joint to fail because it’s cheaper. The expansion joint is there to protect the pump from these types of events. End users see the advantage of the expansion joint for that specific reason. You can get an expansion joint from Proco right off the shelf in most cases, but you are not going to be able to get a pump directly off the shelf.”

In order to ensure their products are up to a required standard, Proco routinely visits their factories and performs routine testing. They perform batch testing of expansion joints and material identification testing on a regular basis to make sure that the formulations are correct and to ensure that the expansion joints hold up to pressure. As Proco is a company that keeps a large inventory, sometimes rubber products may sit on the shelf for a period of time and not be moved. Therefore, they routinely go through those items and perform durometer hardness testing to check the elasticity of the product. As rubber sits longer on the shelf it becomes harder and more brittle. Rob explains: “We don’t want to put an inferior product out in the market and not have it last. Cure dates and shelf life are important to us! We are constantly rotating our inventory and checking to be sure the durometer hardness level is exactly where it needs to be.”

New marketing initiative

In addition to Proco’s current product offering, the company is also embarking on a new development. “We are in the process of taking all of our catalog products and creating SolidWorks drawings of these products,” says Rob. “We will then take that information and put it on a configuration-type platform, where any of our customers can download CAD (Computer Aided Design) drawings or performance data sheets. Whether it’s an engineer looking to get a SolidWorks model and put it into his piping diagram system to check dimensional values, or as a requisition sheet for somebody to purchase the products – customers can download the information to use it however they wish,” says Rob. “Our goal is to get relevant expansion joint data out in the hope that people might standardize on our products.” Therefore, in addition to Proco having a large inventory of stock available, their catalog products’ designs will also be readily available via this new customer-driven tool.

Endorsing best practices

Proco prides itself on its commitment to the customer and to the industry as a whole, no more evident than

the company's involvement with numerous industry organizations, something that Rob believes is very important. Proco is heavily involved with promoting best practices of expansion joint design and making sure that they support the industry organizations in every way, shape and form. This is clearly evident by the vast amount of associations which Proco invests its time. Proco has been an outstanding member of WEF (Water Environment Federation) in the water & wastewater market, making sure that they promote the best practices of WEF. Similarly, Proco is a member of the Cooling Tower Institute and the American Water Works Association (AWWA). In addition, Rob explains his direct involvement with both the Fluid Sealing Association (FSA) and the National Association of Hose and Accessories Distributors (NAHAD): "I am on the Board of Directors of the FSA and also the Vice President for a 2-year term, meaning I will eventually become President. Other members and I, all of whom are on the piping expansion joint technical side, recently finished the eighth edition of the piping expansion joint handbook, which will be out in the marketplace very shortly. I was also asked to be a manufacturing board member of NAHAD, which I accepted last year and feel very fortunate to be able to serve NAHAD in that role. We want to make sure that we represent the industry and give back. I think it's important as a company to do that; to give your time to promote the reason why you're in business."

Keeping a pulse for the future

In a competitive industry, Proco manages to stay in tune with current trends by continuously looking at the market to define what's going on. Whether it is mining, steel, power, water & wastewater or petrochemical, Proco makes it their aim to be able to point their extensive agent network in the right direction. "We really take our time in understanding the project aspect of the business," says Rob. "We try to get down to the distributor level through our agent base in order to get those potential leads out to the distributors and again, to try to add value. We deal with end users but we also have a great track record with distributors and they know we are serving them and the end user at the same time. We value distribution wholeheartedly."

Proco is always looking to add product lines, and will continue to add products that fit in line with the business model. There are new elastomers and improved formulations in the market that they will continue to explore. Proco has recently received their NSF 61 (National Sanitation Foundation) certification for EPDM spool joints and PTFE-lined rubber molded joints. "The expansion joint industry is very similar to the tire

industry. There are little tweaks that can improve the performance of a tire and it's the same with expansion joints. To continue to serve our customers well, we must ensure that we are always exploring, always in contact with those who are designing new systems, and giving them the best information that we can."



Warehouse inventory ready to be shipped to Proco Customers.



Series 230 Pressure Balanced expansion joints sold by Proco Project Specialist, Nick Ponder.

AT A GLANCE: Proco Products Inc.

Years in business: 33 years

Headquarters: 2431 North Wigwam Drive,
Stockton, CA 95205, USA

Product offering: rubber expansion joints, PTFE pipe expansion joints, ducting expansion joints, braided flexible metal connectors, low torque gaskets, pipe penetration seals, rubber pipe connectors, rubber check valves

Industries: water & wastewater, chemical/ petrochemical, HVAC, industrial, marine, mining, oil & gas, power generation, pulp & paper, steel

Website: www.procoproducts.com

