

COLTRACO

Carl Hunter, Managing Director & CEO, Coltraco Ltd



As International Fire Buyer celebrates its 25th Anniversary, it is with some delight that I can say that Coltraco Limited is too! To the Publisher, Editor and Staff of IFB I offer our congratulations and a very happy anniversary.

We view the industry through a unique and narrow prism in application technology, but given the array of customer markets which we serve in power generating and electricity and gas distribution, fire engineering, Defence, aerospace, offshore oil & gas, steel, telecommunications, data centres and shipping, we have the great privilege of overview, a global overview, that enables us to see how these industries approach fire safety and fire engineering, across 104 countries. Over this period of 25 years we have seen the number of fires in London actively decreased by better fire prevention and better fire protection systems. Only in the last 5 years tremendous improvements have been made in London Fire Brigade response times. In 2007/08, the first fire engine mobilised to a 999 call arrived within five minutes 58.8% of the time, and within eight minutes 90% of the time. The second fire engine deployed arrived within eight minutes 81.9% of the time, and within ten minutes 92.4% of the time. In 2010/11, the average response time of the first fire engine was 5 minutes 34 seconds, and of the second fire engine was 6 minutes 53 seconds. Unfortunately over the same period the wider responsibilities of the Fire Brigades across the country have been dramatically broadened to include virtually all emergency roles not covered by the other 'blue light' services.

You may know that Coltraco manufacture equipment monitors fixed

fire suppression systems. Those systems are designed to actuate automatically in the event of fire. The regulations that underpin them are though, at their core, many years old, some over 70 years old. At their core lay the annual certification check. There exists widespread conformance and implementation of them in the OECD countries, but in the inter-connected world we exist in, it cannot be said that the wider world beyond OECD is so conformant. More than this however, is the essential criticality as to why the annual certification check is something sensible or sufficient in today's market. What car buyer today in the UK thinks an annual MOT for their vehicle is as important as their scheduled service interval?

In just the same way that we have seen FM-200™ and NOVEC™ 1230 replacement suppressants for Halon 1301 add technical, environmental and performance value to customers and industrial user alike, so too have we seen price escalation in these as much as in the values of the assets they are designed to protect. Is it any longer sufficient or professionally prudent to rely on one day in 365 for an annual check? Is the industry now ready to not only continue to offer the professional value it is in reducing the amount of fires that it has in the last 25 years, but to add to this by offering customers the means to monitor for themselves that the suppressants they have procured are actually there and ready to discharge and suppress when needed?

Unfortunately, we come across too many instances around the world where there has been no change at all in the last 25 years. Too many shipping companies report that their CO² systems have been certified but

improperly.

Too many quality marine servicing companies report that they have been re-contracted by ship owners who suspect unreported defects in their ships suppression systems, only to find under-filled or completely discharged CO² cylinders. Sadly there remain too many instances of seafarers actually losing their lives because of poorly maintained CO² systems. Some of them would not even actuate when triggered at all. Too much competition still leaves room in the industry for poor service companies to win contracts on lower prices only to under-perform at certification. Across the world ashore we are seeing instances of automatic suppression system cylinder systems being under-filled, incorrectly filled and poorly installed and in some instances, filled with sand or water instead of the suppressant contracted for.

These 25 years have seen a host of wonderful and progressive changes across the fire protection sector and International Fire Buyer has reported all of them. There remains much to do! At its heart should be a constant state of enquiry as to regulatory change to mandate that automatic fire suppression systems are permanently monitored 24/7. The technology exists and its application by premier safety-aware customers is occurring. Let the change begin to de-risk and let International Fire Buyer enjoy another 25 years in reporting them!