

Flexaust: The Solutions-Based Approach

Flexaust's industry-leading global network and 24 hour shipping guarantee



Soon to reach 80 years in the hose and ducting business, Flexaust are specialists in industrial and commercial applications involving air, dust, fume and lightweight materials. With manufacturing and distribution facilities spanning the United States, and a long-established global support network, the company is well versed at providing the right solution to industry needs. Manufacturing products in a wide array of materials, including thermoplastic rubber, polyurethane, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), neoprene, polyester, vinyl fabric and polyethylene, Flexaust hoses and ducting solutions are used throughout a wide range of markets, including construction, woodworking, plastics, fracking, agriculture, lawn & leaf, vehicle exhaust, insulation blowing, shipbuilding and more.

Hose & Coupling World had the pleasure of speaking with Mike Harvey, Vice President - General Manager, and Mike O'Brien, Vice President of Sales & Marketing, about Flexaust's solutions-based approach to product development, their popular 24 Hour Shipping Program and the company's continued investment in process and product development.

By Melanie Gogan, Editor



From left to right: Mike O'Brien, Vice President of Sales & Marketing; Richard Meyer, CEO; and Mike Harvey, Vice President - General Manager

The story of Flexaust begins in 1938, when an Arizona mining engineer named Harold Hersey from Callahan Mining Corp. developed a flexible hose system capable of venting harmful fumes out of the mines and bringing fresh air in. Designed using cotton fabric, coated in neoprene rubber and adhered to wire, the innovative construction sparked a long-standing commitment to delivering practical application solutions.

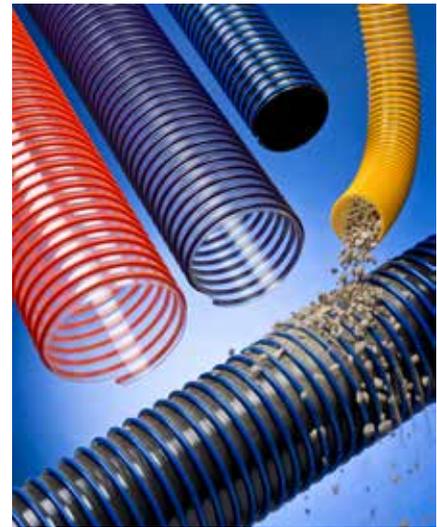
"During World War II, when the industry started to boom, there were more applications that started in the Flexaust range, for moving air, fumes and dust. The applications grew over the years," says Harvey. In the mid-70s, the company took a new direction, entering into a licensing agreement with German industrial enterprise, Schauenburg. Harvey explains, "It gave us plastic hose technology in the U.S. From there, we



Flx-Thane® polyurethane hose in five wall thicknesses



UL94V0 Hoses



Flex-Tube PU 60 HF

were doing polyurethanes, PVCs (polyvinyl chlorides) and thermoplastic rubbers; not just the neoprene-coated fabric hoses of years past."

Now the largest company within the Schauenburg Hose Technology Group, Flexaust's worldwide support network provides unparalleled global resources and manufacturing capabilities. With the combined support of their affiliate companies in Germany, France, China and Canada, catering to the medical, appliance and sanitation hose markets, Flexaust is able to bring its own R&D and marketing initiatives to the next level. Harvey explains, "Because of how we are set-up globally, we do share information, market-wise and technology-wise, with these sister companies. For instance, if we get a lead with a European company, depending on the product, we will send that lead to Europe. Similarly, we would send a medical lead up north to Canada, and vice versa."

Shipping solutions

Flexaust's 24 Hour Shipping Program

Headquartered in San Diego, California, Flexaust's coverage spans coast to coast and includes distribution in North, Central and South America. The company has manufacturing facilities in Warsaw, Indiana; Las Vegas, Nevada; Amesbury, Massachusetts and El Paso, Texas; as well as warehousing facilities in Atlanta, Georgia; Houston, Texas and Nuevo León, Mexico. This expansive production and warehousing base allows Flexaust the ability to offer their guaranteed 24 Hour Shipping Program, which includes 20 hose products in various diameters from each product family.

O'Brien explains, "We have a very large inventory. We stock our 24 Hour Shipping Program at all of our locations, with the exception of El Paso. We are able to service the customer in a timely manner, and we are able to reduce the freight costs to our customers, because we have hose and ducting close to them."

Now more than ever, manufacturers are expected to do more than just make products. To that end, Flexaust is committed to driving business and working as partners with their distributors to find new opportunities. Their success

in providing their distributors with fast, reliable service is reflected through the recognition of their peers. In fact, they were recently honored at the IDCO (Industrial Distributor Co-Operative) Tradeshow in Fort Worth, Texas, with the 2016 Supplier of the Year award – Flexaust's third time winning the award in this category. Along with their strong affiliation with IDCO, they are also long-standing members of NAHAD (Association for Hose and Accessories Distribution), the VDTA (Vacuum Dealers Trade Association) and ISSA (The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association).

Further driving business, Flexaust offers its distributors priority access to customer leads through their Lead Qualification Program. Commenting on the program, O'Brien says, "We qualify product leads in-house and share that with our top distributors. Flexaust's Lead Qualification Program is one of the best in the industry." He adds, "Our main focus is on a selective distribution program. For each market, we select the best distributors for that market place. So, while we do sell to large OEMs directly in some cases, it generally depends on the selling situation."

"We qualify product leads in-house and share that with our top distributors. Flexaust's Lead Qualification Program is one of the best in the industry."

- Mike O'Brien, Vice President of Sales & Marketing

Engineered for performance

"All the runs, all the set-ups and in-process inspections are done per our ISO-driven Flexaust Quality Management System manual," explains Harvey. While the company is rated to ISO 9000 standards, Harvey asserts that the company in fact operates in accordance with ISO 9001 standards – standards they attribute, in large part, to the managerial excellence of their Quality Assurance department.

Incorporating the latest operating standards, along with a keen insight into industry needs results in products made to perform. "We make hoses 14 different ways," says O'Brien. Whether they are specially designed to dissipate static





charge, prevent fire hazards or simply increase flexibility and ease-of-use for operators in the field, Flexaust offers the right solution for a large range of end user applications.

Anti-static solution

Over the past few years, the company has developed four different products that dissipate static. Commenting on the engineering involved, O'Brien says, "To produce an effective static-dissipating hose, we consider not only the ground wire, but also the hose material itself." He adds, "We have definitely made the work place safer."

For safety critical bulk loading and unloading applications, such as truck and railcar product transfer and grain-vac operations, Flexaust has introduced the FlexStat®60 Static Dissipative Hose. This durable heavy-walled polyurethane hose has an embedded copper grounding wire that is flexible and operates over a wide temperature range. Paired with their recently introduced screw-on conductive PVC cuffs, Flexaust provides a complete solution for static protection.

*"We have definitely made the work place safer."
- Mike O'Brien, Vice President of Sales & Marketing*

Fire-retardant solution

The company offers a broad range of self-extinguishing hoses developed with work safety in mind. O'Brien says, "One of the things we're proud of is the fact that we have more hose certified to UL (Underwriters Laboratories) standards for flame-retardance in the United States than all our competitors combined. That speaks largely to our commitment to safety."

Designed to meet or exceed UL 94V-0 requirements for flame-retardance, Flexaust's UL94V-0 rated hoses include



15 standard products made from neoprene polyester, PVC polyester, acrylic polyester, PVC, polyurethane and thermo-plastic rubber. These hoses are ideally suited for dust collection and fume extraction applications in the agricultural, automotive, chemical, coatings, industrial, metal-working, shipbuilding, utility and woodworking industries.

Flex-Tube® solution:

The use of polyurethane for hose construction continues to trend throughout the industry; and Flexaust is no exception, continually adding more products made of this versatile material. O'Brien emphasizing the ease of use of polyurethane hose, not only from a flexibility stand-point, but also in terms of weight. "Polyurethane is about half the weight of heavier walled EPDM (ethylene propylene diene monomer), thermoplastics and rubber hose materials, and just as durable. It is abrasive, fume-resistant and able to handle corrosive materials," he asserts.

The company's Flex-Tube PU-XT – a recent addition to their Flex-Tube line – is yet another example of the practicality and durability of polyurethane. Designed for dust collection from heat generating processes, this hose is both puncture- and tear-resistant, and capable of operating at extremely high temperatures, up to 260°F. The hose is ideally suited for cutting and surface preparation processes that generate heat or involve water tanks.

In addition to introducing more polyurethanes into the Flexaust portfolio, the company is also developing more heavy-walled hose options, capable of enduring severe service applications. According to O'Brien, the addition of thicker-walled hoses, such as the recently introduced Flex-Stat®80, with .080" wall thickness has opened new markets. "Providing increased wall thickness sizes, and in turn durability, allows us to accommodate new applications that

FLEXAUST AT A GLANCE

○ 1938

Flexaust is established as a division of Callahan Mining Corp.

○ 1970s

Flexaust enters into licensing agreement with Schauenburg Hose Technology Company in Germany, bringing plastic hose technology to the U.S.

○ Mid-1980s

Flexaust introduces Genesis all-plastic vacuum hose line

○ 1995

Schaenburg acquires Flexaust from Coeur d'Alene Mines, who had acquired Callahan Mining Corp. in 1992



we weren't able to support in the past. Unloading railway cars is just one example," he says.

Networking solutions

Active in social media networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, Flexaust understands how staying visible and being interactive plays a large role in keeping ahead of the curve. O'Brien elaborates, "As we see our customer base get younger, we've seen an uptick in social media activity, especially in the past two years." In keeping with online industry trends, the company even boasts its own app. The Flexaust Connect mobile app provides users with a fast, streamlined method of researching and ordering their hose, ducting and accessories from any location, right in the palm of their hands.

A fundamental way in which the company stays on top of market trends and innovations is attributed to the work of their skilled engineering department in Warsaw, Indiana and R&D department in Amesbury, Massachusetts; which is complimented by the ongoing support of their sister companies.

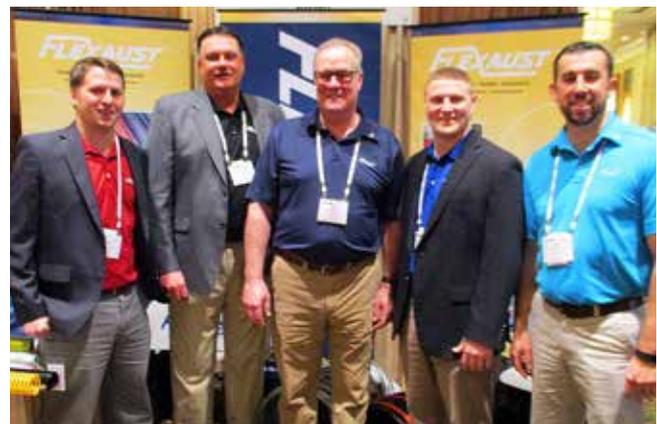
"The communication between our sister companies ensures that we have global presence and awareness of anything new that's coming to the marketplace," explains O'Brien. Also on the horizon, the company recently won approval from Warsaw City Council for a 10-year tax abatement that will coincide with a USD \$7 million expansion to its main manufacturing facility in Warsaw, Indiana. The company, which currently employs 182 associates in Warsaw, anticipates hiring approximately 15 more this year, with an additional 25 to 40 new hires anticipated over the next few years.

"Newer, successful product lines come from being solutions based."

- Mike Harvey, Vice President – General Manager

Much of the construction will be at the Armstrong Road plant on the city's west side where two buildings are currently joined by an above-ground tunnel. When construction is complete, the two buildings will be merged – an expansion that "just makes sense," says Harvey. Once completed, the project will result in a total building space of 225,000 sq. ft., and will allow for increased stocking capabilities, in terms of fixed goods and inventory.

Harvey concludes by stressing the company's ongoing commitment to investing in process and product development, their focus on long-term objectives, as well as their unwavering loyalty to their customers. He says, "Newer, successful product lines come from being solutions based. Listening and coming-up with a new product that has not been there – this is unique to us versus our competitors; and is supported through our connection with our sister companies."



Flexaust exhibits at the IDCO Tradeshow in Fort Worth, Texas. From left to right: Sean O'Brien, Darren Scott, Jim Trimble, Chris Sharpe and Mike Welk

1997

Flexaust completes company restructuring and consolidates into two main locations: Corporate Headquarters in California and Sales & Main Manufacturing facility in Indiana.

2001

Flexaust acquires Dayco's Dayflex division and moves into the homecare/floorcare market. Gains location in El Paso, Texas

2008

Opens manufacturing facility in Amesbury, Massachusetts

2012

Flexaust acquires The United Electric Company (TUEC) and expands floor tools, wands and accessories capabilities

