



Proco's 72" 730 Check Valves readied for shipment.

## Customer-First Philosophy: PROCO is always available to help customers succeed

*With the largest inventory of rubber expansion joints in North America, Proco Products is ready to serve their customers' needs, offering "virtually immediate shipment", 12 hours of live customer service staggered for different time zones, next-day priority call sequencing and 24-hour emergency service. With a near-exclusive focus on expansion joints and check valves, experienced staff can provide expert customer support, while PROCO's R&D department continues to search for new and better ways to improve a time-honored product. Hose + Coupling World was delighted to speak to Mike Lassas, Vice President – Administration, James Gannatal, P.E., Mechanical Engineer, and Ed Marchese, President & CEO, about how the company is adapting to serve the needs of its customers, who are under more pressure than ever to work faster and smarter with fewer resources.*

By Editorial Team

Proco Products is a global leader in the design and supply of expansion joints for piping and ducting systems in a near-endless variety of applications, including oil and gas, HVAC, power generation, water and wastewater and more. While its primary focus is rubber and molded PTFE expansion joints, it also offers braided flexible hose assemblies, low torque sealing gaskets and its Series 700 ProFlex™ rubber duckbill check valves, commonly used to prevent the back flow of fluids and gases from sewage treatment plants, outfalls and tidal operations.

Customers can also choose from a wide selection of elastomers, including Butyl, EPDM, CSM, Neoprene, Nitrile, Natural Rubber and PTFE. Other elastomers are available upon request and PROCO's Chemical/Rubber Compatibility Guide can help customers to make the best selection for the application.

"Officially" founded in 1984, PROCO was actually formed several years earlier when Protective Coatings of Fort Wayne, IN, decided to divest its expansion joint product line. Gene Johnson – who was working



*Proco Products, Inc. headquarters in Stockton, CA USA.*



*Proco participates in a number of trade shows each year, both domestic and abroad.*



*Oversized shipments can be accommodated for delivery to customer.*

as a distributor for Protective Coatings – and his business partner, Merv Vater, saw a golden opportunity and bought the company in 1980, shortening the name to PROCO. Johnson and Vater were business partners, friends and firm believers that in business you have to “work harder and smarter than your competitors” – a philosophy that rings as true today as it did nearly 40 years ago.

#### **Always available to serve the customer**

PROCO is well-aware of the pain-points of its customers and the time pressures they are under; while quality will always come first, availability of product, lightning-fast delivery and immediate technical support follow closely behind. With \$2.5 million dollars of inventory – in hundreds of styles, compounds, and sizes up to 72” ID – located at its Stockton, California headquarters, customers can be sure that the product they need is in stock and ready to ship within 24 to 48 hours.

“When a customer calls in, they get a real person on the other end,” says Ed Marchese, President & CEO. “Our customer service representatives can help the customer through the whole experience, from product inquiry to placing the order. It can all be done in one phone call and we take great pride in that.”

To serve its customers in all time zones, the company staggers its sales staff across a whopping 12 hours, from 5:30 AM to 5:15 PM. (PDT). Customers who call outside of those hours and leave a message are automatically assigned to priority service the following day. In an emergency, customers can use PROCO’s emergency service to reach a staff member at any time, day or night – even on weekends and holidays.

Considering distributors make up 65% of its customer base, it makes sense that PROCO goes to great lengths to build and maintain exceptional relationships with them, which is reflected in the number of

orders that are shipped directly from its warehouse to distributor customers. “It speaks to our track record,” he explains. “We respect our distribution network and we protect it. We sell to some OEMs and EPCs – who are not the end users but are purchasing on their behalf – but we do not sell directly to end users.”

#### **EPDM & Neoprene rubber NSF-61 certification**

The most recent jewel in the company crown is NSF/ANSI Standard 61 certification on its Rubber Expansion Joints and ProFlex™ Check Valve product line. NSF/ANSI Standard 61 standards were developed by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to establish stringent requirements for the control of equipment that comes into contact with potable water or products that support the production of potable water.

“Basically, an NSF-61 certification verifies that your product can be put into a potable water system without giving off a sour or foul taste,” explains Mike Lassas, Vice President – Administration. “This is easier said than done with a rubber compound. Imagine taking the tire off your car, filling it with water and then drinking it. There’s a lot of foul stuff that can get transferred into the drinking water.”

He continues: “The certification has been around for a number of years, but it has been very difficult for rubber expansion joint companies to attain because of the mixing, calendaring and manufacturing process. There are a lot of different chemicals and formulas involved, but we worked diligently to come up with rubber compounds that we felt could work.”

The company worked with Underwriters Laboratories (UL), a global independent safety science company, who observed the manufacturing process to verify that the products were produced in a clean, contaminant-free atmosphere from beginning to end. Once the manufacturing process was complete, the product





Mike Lassas, Ed Marchese and James Gannatal showcase tried-and-true Proco products.

was brought back to UL facilities, where it was submerged in a tank of water for up to 21 days.

After the waiting period, UL took a sample of the water and ran a chemical analysis, comparing the chemical levels against those of healthy drinking water, and, ultimately, awarded PROCO the much-coveted green light.

“The testing process was lengthy and costly, but it was worth it,” says Lassas. “PROCO is now one of two companies that have the NSF-61 certification, and the only manufacturer to have a true all rubber certification with their EPDM expansion joint compound.”

With increasing demand among engineers for NSF-61 certification, PROCO has secured a significant leg-up on its competition. “In California, NSF-61 certification is a big deal. In many of the municipal magazines — WaterWorld or the Water & Wastes Digest, for example — we frequently come across NSF-61 as a requirement for basically any water transmission applications, whether it is clean or dirty water.”

“Engineers want the NSF-61 certification, because it is a high-quality certification. It is rapidly becoming the standard for municipal entities,” he adds.

#### Instant access to design and technical information

In conjunction with SolidWorks, the premier design software used by engineers to model parts, PROCO has integrated its complete line of designs onto TraceParts International, one of the biggest 2D and 3D CAD part libraries in the world.

Through TraceParts, PROCO’s standard products are available for download in various CAD formats, includ-



Product submittal forms can be downloaded from the company website.

ing SolidWorks, ProE and AutoCAD, allowing engineers to download models for use in designing their piping schemes, learn more about PROCO product lines and access immediate technical design information for early implementation into their piping applications.

“Let’s say a Piping Stress Engineer is designing a system,” explains Mechanical Engineer, James Gannatal, P.E. “They know they need an expansion joint in their system and they have an idea of the design requirements that they need to meet. They can use TraceParts to configure a size and style that will suit their design requirements, as well as get all the design data they need to run a simulation or pipe stress analysis. From there, they can import the required CAD model of the expansion joint into their own CAD systems to make sure that everything fits, and that there isn’t going to be any clearance issues with adjacent equipment.”

Free of charge and accessible to anyone online, customers can access technical information instantly. “Many people don’t want to have to contact somebody to get the information they need,” says Gannatal. “By incorporating TraceParts into our toolbox, we are giving customers the option to interact with us in whatever way is convenient for them — and because TraceParts is a library of our standard catalogue items, the product is virtually always in stock and ready for immediate shipment.”

“TraceParts has been a true asset to us,” adds Lassas. “Not only does it make life easier for our customers, but it is also a tremendous lead-generator for the company. When an engineer goes online and downloads one of our CAD models, it gets assigned a unique number and we get an alert. We are able to

see what they've downloaded and what they are trying to accomplish, and we can reach out to them to offer additional support or determine if what they actually need is a custom item. If they need something custom, we can work with them to design and manufacture it."

### Working together to set the standard

Committed to serving both its customers and the industry in which it operates, PROCO is active in numerous technical and trade organizations, most notably the Fluid Sealing Association (FSA) – an international trade association which serves as the primary source of technical information, standards development and education in the arena of fluid sealing applications.

PROCO's involvement in the FSA goes as far back as its founder, Merv Vater, who served as president from 2001 through 2002 and was a member of the Board of Directors from 1995 to 2005. Marchese, PROCO's current President & CEO, served as FSA president from 2010 through 2012 and was a member of the Board of Directors from 2006 to 2014, and Rob Coffee, PROCO's VP of Sales & Marketing, is poised to take the reins at the end of this year.

Comprised of member companies involved in the production and marketing of a wide range of fluid sealing devices for the industrial market, FSA members account for the majority of manufacturing capacity for fluid sealing devices in the Americas market. In other words, the FSA is comprised of PROCO – and nearly all of its competitors.

"We battle through the year and then we come together twice a year to break bread," jokes Lassas. "It's good for everybody involved; we develop the technical specifications and guidelines that we all live by."

"Being a member of the FSA allows us to come together, not as competitors, but as one group," adds Marchese. "We develop standards and guidelines for our customers to specify and purchase non-metallic piping and ducting expansion joints. These stand-



Over \$2 million in inventory lines the walls of Proco's Stockton, CA, warehouse.

ards and guidelines have been established to ensure that every product sold by an FSA member-company meets or exceeds the performance requirements for the intended product application."

### Continuous growth

Continuing to thrive in a competitive industry is not easy. Often, it requires creativity, ingenuity and calculated risk – qualities that PROCO appears to have in spades.

"About five years ago, we committed to growing our presence in the international market," explains Marchese. "While we have always had an international presence, we had not made it a priority to get PROCO face-to-face with our overseas customers, or to explore opportunities to expand our international customer base."

"We realized that it's incredibly important to have feet on the ground when it comes to really building trust with our international customers. To keep PROCO top of mind, we made a conscious decision to invest in more international travel, and to put our representatives in front of the customer – physically. We travel to the Middle East, South America, Australia and Asia, not only to find distributors to represent PROCO in those areas but also to participate in international trade shows."

"Excuse the pun, but in a word, PROCO's future is about expanding," adds Gannatal. "We are always looking at new ways to improve our designs or develop new ones that will help to solve a problem for the end user. We are constantly looking to improve on what we have, whether that is in the design or by incorporating new materials. We are always looking for new ways to grow and to identify new markets."



NSF-certified products display this logo.

