



Steam trap surveys payback within four months

Spirax Sarco steam trap surveys are highlighting energy and maintenance savings that are achieving paybacks of less than four months at a chemicals producer in Warrington. The first survey at the site also revealed a 50% failure rate for fixed orifice traps from another supplier.

Following the success of an initial survey, PQ Silicas (formally INEOS Silicas) has rolled out a programme of trap surveys around its entire Warrington site, which has a population of several hundred steam traps. “It’s hard to fully quantify the savings, but I’d say the payback on a survey is typically three to four months,” says Mr Andy Hitchin, Energy Manager, PQ Silicas. Furthermore, PQ Silicas decided to opt for Spirax Sarco steam traps with Quick fit fittings. This installation gave them double block and bleed, which enables them to replace

faulty traps without waiting months for a scheduled plant shutdown and means the company can benefit from energy savings immediately.

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PQ Silicas is a world leader in silica and alumina technology, with over 900 employees and eight manufacturing sites in five continents. Its products include liquid and solid silicates, gel and precipitated silicas and a range of zeolites for detergent and other applications.

Production rates vary at the Warrington site, consuming up to 50 tonnes of steam an hour via an extensive distribution system. The initial two-day steam trap survey was ordered after it became clear that a significant number of traps had failed. “They didn’t cause us any problems with our process, but they were obviously wasting energy,” Mr Hitchin says. The failures also created a maintenance issue, since condensate was not being removed effectively and was accumulating in the pipes.

PQ Silicas asked Spirax Sarco to focus on the traps around the boiler plant and the pipework leading to the process plant. The survey found a particular problem with the fixed orifice traps. Frustratingly, PQ Silicas had to sit on the results for several months until the next plant shutdown, because it



was impossible to isolate the affected traps and remove them safely while the plant was up and running. This is a common problem on many sites and the Warrington plant sometimes operates for up to three years without a break.

Since then, PQ Silicas has standardised on Spirax Sarco steam traps equipped with Quick fit fittings. The Quick fit system allows maintenance staff to isolate a defective trap and remove it safely in a matter of minutes, “Now if we spot

a problem, we can do something about it straight away,” says Mr Hitchin.

The company has also asked Spirax Sarco to continue providing annual surveys to keep the plant running as energy efficiently as possible. “No one can afford to waste energy these days, especially with the way gas prices are rising,” adds Mr Hitchin.

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