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Flexicon

Case History

Rotating Drum/Bulk Bag Filler Plays Role in Quality of Surfactant Packaging at BASF

WASHINGTON, NJ -- Chemicals producer BASF Corp. recently upgraded the packaging of surfactants with two key additions to its manufacturing plant. One was a purpose-built room designed for greater cleanliness and control in loading surfactants in drums or bulk bags prior to shipping. The other was installation of a rotating drum and bulk bag filler from Flexicon Corp., Bethlehem, PA, that automates the process and yields greater output and quality control than the previous method of manual loading.

BASF surfactants are formulated as liquids and then converted into powders. The materials are usually packaged in 55 gal (208 l) fiber drums and sometimes in 2000 lb (907 kg) bulk bags for shipment to product manufacturers.

Since many surfactants produced by BASF are for the personal care market, their manufacture must meet rigorous quality standards. The plant is certified as ISO 9001:2000, is FDA regulated and conforms to Good Manufacturing Practices. Processes comply with U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) and National Formulary (NF) guidelines. Hence, the need for a packaging operation that is accurate, efficient and capable of maintaining high levels of quality control, says Sherri Molomo, senior process engineer at BASF.

Prior to construction of the room and installation of the bulk bag and drum filler, an operator moved a drum to a weigh-filling station, operated a slide gate to fill it, checked the weight and, if it exceeded the limit, adjusted as needed. After filling, a drum was physically moved onto a pallet for transport.

To automate the process, BASF specified a Flexicon Rear-Post Bulk Bag Filler that also has the capability to fill four fiber drums



Automated drum filler utilizes an indexing diverter head to fill four 55 gal (208 liter) drums sequentially with surfactant powder gravity feeding from rotary valve at top. System can also be configured for loading 2000 lb (907 kg) bulk bags.



PLC communicates with weigh-filler scale to regulate product flow into each drum and shut down on reaching a pre-set weight. Four drums await filling as four are about to exit the room. System improves product output, worker safety, and quality control.

sequentially. An automated conveyor system now moves drums and bulk bags in and out of the filling station, and a rotary valve meters the required weight of material with a high degree of accuracy.

The bulk bag and drum filler incorporates design features developed by both companies.

BASF added a dust-collection system on the machine attached via flex-hose to contain particles that rise up during loading. The company also specified an Allen-Bradley PLC (programmable logic controller) to automate operations. The PLC communicates with a Mettler Toledo weigh-filler scale to regulate product flow and shut down the operation when a pre-set weight is reached.

An operator selects the appropriate product-loading program on the PLC and pushes a button to start the filling process. Surfactants are transported from the main plant to a vessel above the rotary valve, then gravity-fed into either a drum or a bulk bag.

When filling drums, the operator attaches the automatically rotating drum fill adapter to the



Pallet of four drums is conveyed into purpose-built loading room where they are filled by rotating drum/bulk bag filler.

Flexicon bulk filling station. Once the four drums have been positioned on the deck of the filling station, the operator presses a start-up button on the PLC and surfactant begins flowing. Each drum has a plastic lining into which the surfactant empties. When one drum fills, flow is interrupted while the diverter head indexes to fill the next drum in sequence. Once all drums are filled, the operator seals the liners, and puts lids on the drums. The drums are then transported via conveyor out of the purpose-built loading room into the shipping area.

When filling a bulk bag, an operator attaches the four bag straps to each corner of the loading frame, engages the bulk bag fill spout to the fill head utilizing an inflatable collar to provide a dust tight connection

and puts the bag in a rubber bladder, which seals the surfactant in the bag after product is loaded, and acts as an extra layer of protection during transport. The frame raises to accommodate the height of the bag. The bag rests on a pallet atop the weigh-filler scale, which takes up about 25 sq. ft. (2.3 sq. m.) of floor space. The scale transmits weight data to the PLC, which automatically stops the flow of material when the correct weight of surfactant has been loaded. The bag is then closed and moved on the roller conveyor to the shipping area.

Molomo states that the automated loading process significantly enhances the surfactants packaging operation and increases operator productivity. Most importantly, though, is the improvement in operator ergonomics and safety, as well as elimination of operator involvement in the filling process.

This has resulted in a more effective use of personnel. These benefits also mean less potential for contamination of surfactants during packaging.

In assessing the impact of the loading room and the Flexicon bulk bag and drum filler on operations, Molomo notes, "Our products have become better by using better tools."



Filled drums are conveyed from loading room to shipping area

flexicon®

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