

Increasing awareness to fireproof operations

SCHALK BURGER | FEATURES REPORTER

Abrasion, corrosion and insulation specialist company Uretech sees a much bigger drive among heavy industry companies to fireproof the parts of their operations where fires can start or where equipment can be damaged by fire, says Uretech operational director **Robert Martin**.

He believes that the latest demand for fireproofing, prevention and protection products is from industries that have not previously given as much attention to fire risks as other industries, such as the petrochemicals industry, and have realised that fires can cause the loss of production and revenue and can undermine their long-term sustainability.

He explains that there is great demand for fireproof products in the petrochemicals industry that focuses on preventing fires from spreading. This industry has looked at fireproofing pipeline flanges, where hydrocarbon gas leaks can occur, to prevent damage to the pipeline in the event of a fire. It is often the expansion of flange bolts caused

by heat that opens leaks further, enabling fires to spread. Hence, there is a need to fireproof such joins to contain fires.

Industries now demanding fireproofing products are made aware of the risks of fire by local and international industry trends that continually promote health and safety, he says.

"Health and safety are big drivers in terms of fireproofing. The focus is to change from merely erecting buildings and plants to questioning if the buildings are fireproof, safe and environment friendly," Martin says.

For example, Uretech is working on a project for a sugar mill, which, after undergoing a fire audit, is making itself more compliant with the recommendations of the audit. Uretech launched a lightweight and asbestos-free fireproof insulating panel, the Cuttleboard, in 2009, that can be used in drywalls and to replace ceiling panels in buildings. The locally designed, developed and manufactured panels are being installed in the sugar mill's control room to protect it from fire.

The panels insulate the room, reducing the energy consumption for heating or cooling, and also reduce costs because the mill does not have to install separate insulation and fireproofing products. The panels are placed on the roof and on the walls of the control room, because a conveyor belt carrying hot product passes over the room. Any product that lands on the roof in the event of a spill will roll off without causing a fire.

Uretech is also applying its fire-rated lagging and cladding products to hot gas lines that run near the control room and the conveyor belt. The company aims to prevent fires in the mill and, if a flammable product leaks onto the lines, it will not ignite because the line insulation covers do not get hot enough to cause ignition. The insulating covers are so designed that, if liquid at 200 °C lands on the covers, they will continue to provide protection.

Uretech has also noted that the local demand for cost-effective fireproofing products has increased as companies seek to prevent fires. In response, the company has developed a range of fireproof-rated polyurethane wear-resistant products. This has opened up a new market for the company.

"There are many opportunities in local industry for fireproofing and prevention. Heavy industries are fireproofing fuel lines, cables and equipment to ensure that fires are contained. More customers are coming forward with problems, such as how to



ROBERT MARTIN
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make flanges, pumps and seals fireproof to prevent failure in the event of a fire," Martin explains.

Industries at high risk from fire hazards, such as petrochemicals and gas, have always been aware of fire risks and have actively reduced these risks through fireproofing, prevention and protection.

Martin explains that one of the stumbling blocks for the fireproofing industry is to get products fire-rated and approved. South Africa has diligent and thorough agencies that test and approve fireproofing products, but they are flooded with requests for fire ratings and have a backlog of applications. This is a challenge for companies trying to launch new products, when customers often use older products that do not afford them the same benefits as newer products.

There is an awareness of fire risks among South African companies, but the technology to reduce these risks is not always available locally. This means that fire rating agencies must increase their capacity to deal with the number of requests coming from local industries, which often have their products approved internationally, as they cannot afford the delay associated with South African fire rating agencies.

Q: Do I have to have a baby shower?
A: Not if you change the baby's diaper very quickly.