

Noxon gears up

“At Noxon, service, flexibility and quality are not just empty phrases. It is how we do business.” This statement by Commercial Director Helma Hermes may sound bold, but during a visit to Noxon’s headquarters at Helmond, the Netherlands, Valve World found plenty of substance to back it up.

By Esther Martensen and David Sear

It is not hard to locate the Noxon Stainless BV office, located in Helmond, in the South of the Netherlands. When you enter the town, just look for the one parking lot that houses almost nothing but red cars. This is the official company colour and it is carried through even into the means of transportation for employees. And it is not only Noxon Stainless that has this policy, for German subsidiary Asadin and Belgian sister company Cotubel also sport the fire-engine red.

Together, these three companies have a very broad range of products in stainless steel, duplex and specialty steels. Products include tubes and pipes, valves, fittings, flanges, bars, profiles and sheets. General Director Mr Dallau: “I believe I am right in saying that there is no other company in Europe that has the same range of products in stainless steel as we have. Our customers can find here, under one roof, what they would otherwise have to contact five different suppliers for. But Noxon is not just a matter of convenience for them, as doing business with us this way

allows them to realise some significant cost savings.”

From its formation back in 1990, Noxon’s policy has been to stock exclusively stainless steel commodities. Today, the company boasts a stocklist with over 10,000 different items. Mr Dallau: “As a reputable service organisation, we put the customer

first. No order is too small or too big for us. Customers who need single items are not compelled to purchase minimum quantities. This policy has helped us win clients in diverse markets, such as the chemical and petrochemical industry, the shipbuilding industry, pulp and paper mills, the offshore sector, construction



From left to right:

Wiljan van Asten	Sales Manager Noxon Stainless B.V. The Netherlands
Lieve van Staen	Sales Manager Cotubel N.V./S.A. Belgium (Flanders)
Helmut Reitz	Sales Manager Asadin Edelstahlhandelsgesellschaft mbH Germany
Thijs van Wely	Export Sales Manager Noxon Stainless B.V. The Netherlands
Babette Brouwier	Sales Manager Cotubel N.V./S.A. Belgium (Wallonia) and Luxembourg
Anne de Jong	Technical Manager Noxon Stainless B.V. The Netherlands
Helma Hermes	Commercial Director Noxon Stainless B.V. and Cotubel N.V./S.A.; Managing Director Asadin Edelstahlhandelsgesellschaft mbH
Luuk A. M. Dallau	Managing Director Noxon Stainless B.V. and Cotubel N.V./S.A.

to the PED



sector and food and dairy plants. Our client base includes end users of course, but also engineering companies and subcontractors as well. Moreover, although we may not stock other materials, we can procure, say, carbon steel valves if our client wishes us to offer a complete suite of items.”

Quality products

A walk through one of Noxon’s many warehouses shows that its valve range is considerable. It includes, but is by no means limited to, ball valves, needle valves, plug valves, globe valves, gate valves and check valves. The range starts from simple, commodity valves and extends right up to some very

expensive models indeed.

Asked where Noxon sources its valves, Ms Hermes indicates that the company enjoys a good reputation for the items it imports from the Far East: A main valve supplier, for example, is MODENTIC Industries, from Taiwan. Noxon is their agent and sole representative in both Holland and Belgium and the management of Noxon Stainless B.V. and Cotubel has been working with them for almost 21 years. Noxon stocks MODENTIC valves in sizes from 1/2” up to 8”. From 8” up to 24” the valves can be supplied from production. Pressure classes range from PN 10 up to PN 140, depending on the size and type of the valve. Mrs. Hermes: “MODENTIC has been known for its quality products for many years and is fully geared to the needs of end users around the world. For example, they have recently upgraded their factory and their products to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Pressure Equipment Directive (PED). In fact, our Technical Manager, Mr. Anne de Jong, has made several trips to Taiwan to work with them and ensure a seamless, trouble-free supply of CE-marked valves for our clients.”

The warehouse tour also provided some examples of Noxon’s service ability. From small issues, such as providing spare parts and alternative handle colours, right through to more complex activities, for example fitting longer spindles or selecting and mounting actuators, Noxon can do it. Mrs. Hermes: “This is all part of our philosophy, taking care of the details so our clients can focus on their own core businesses.”

PED and product liability

Picking up on the issue of the PED, Mr. de Jong stresses that all manufacturers and suppliers providing valves to end users within Europe must ensure their products comply with all European regulations. If a company imports valves from countries outside the European Community and brings them into the EU, he says, then, under the require-

ments of the PED, the importer is seen as the manufacturer. Mr. de Jong: "Put bluntly, the product liability lies with us. Our policy is therefore only to buy from mills which are completely PED approved. Fortunately we have a well-equipped technical department here where we can run various tests to ensure PED compliance. For example, we can pressure test valves up to 1000 bar. We can also conduct ultrasonic thickness measurements whilst a complete chemical analysis is also possible thanks to an in-house spectrometer."

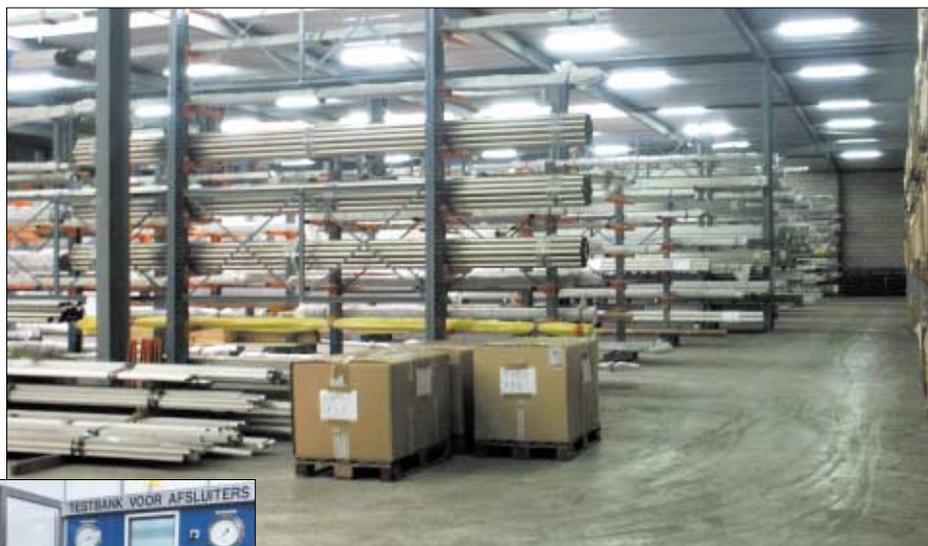
Mr. de Jong further explains just how complex the PED really is. Compliance is not just a matter of providing valves with CE Marks, it appears. "The CE Mark is only part of the issue. For example, many people overlook the requirements regarding manuals for maintenance, installation and operation. Such documents must be available

to the customer, and indeed I would urge them to ask for such paperwork when procuring valves."

As Mr. de Jong says, the PED is really about ensuring valves and other pressure containing products are safe and fit for purpose. Traceability is a cornerstone of the Directive, but this is an issue that is not always fully understood. Mr. de Jong: "A great many manufacturers are in fact little more than traders, who sub-contract out orders. So the names stamped on the valve and in the paperwork may not always be the same. End users must again be particularly careful if they identify such valves. In the worst case it may be necessary to run further tests on the valve. If it has already been installed, then you can imagine the inconvenience and extra costs that would bring."

Changing stocks

Noxon took great pains to understand the PED and its impact on the valve supply chain at an early stage. Having done so, at the start of May 2002 they undertook an unusual step for a stockist – they stopped buying valves! Mr. Dallau explains the rationale behind this move. "We wanted to ensure that all our stocks of valves are ac-



From stock, Noxon can provide a complete range of stainless steel parts, such as valves, tubes, fittings, flanges, etc, which are needed to fabricate installations. The picture shows Noxon Stainless' tube warehouse.



Noxon benefits from a well-equipped technical department where various tests can be run to ensure PED compliance.

ording to the requirements of the PED as soon as possible.

Therefore, we started running down our old,

pre-PED stocks in anticipation of receiving new supplies."

Mrs. Hermes confirms that this decision had an impact on the company's turnover. "We deliberately accepted that we lost some orders during the past eighteen months to be sure we would and could only sell valves in full accordance with applicable specifications before, during and after the implementation

of the PED. This decision has helped us adapt smoothly during the transition period and provide a transparent service to all our clients."

The problem for stockists is, of course, that not every customer needs a valve bearing the CE-Mark. For example, for valves sold outside the EU, or those destined for non-pressurised equipment no CE-Mark is necessary. Moreover, some customers may be reluctant to reveal the exact application for some valves, making it hard for Noxon to provide specific recommendations. Noxon therefore implemented a clear policy during the run-down period: regardless of the customer, each one was fully informed about



Offices and warehouses of Noxon Stainless in Helmond, the Netherlands.



Office and warehouse of sister company Cotubel in Belgium.

the PED before any sale was concluded. About the time this magazine is printed Noxon should be receiving the first of its orders for CE-Marked valves from key supplier MODENTIC. Again, this will cover almost the full range of valve types. Mr. de Jong emphasises that valves will be provided according to Class II specifications. "A problem with industrial types of valves, especially ball valves, is that they are suited to such a wide variety of applications. As a stockist you never know whether your valve is going into a chemical plant or a wastewater treatment unit. To limit valve variability and hence keep costs under control we have therefore elected to stock only Category II valves, which covers almost all the possible range of applications." Mr. de Jong further adds that Category III valves – for unstable gases – can of course be supplied on request.

No empty phrases

This dedication to supplying customers with PED approved products is one example of the lengths to which Noxon will go to satisfy its customers needs. The speed at which it can do this is another one. As Mrs. Hermes

explains: "At Noxon, service, flexibility and quality are not just empty phrases. They represent how we do business." As part of its standard service, she explains, Noxon ensures that almost all orders received during the morning are fulfilled and delivered to customers in mainland Holland the very next day. This service also applies to many customers elsewhere in Europe who are served by sister companies. Noxon also does its best to satisfy customers who need urgent assistance. Ms Hermes: "If our customers find themselves in critical situations, such as during shutdowns, we do our best to go the extra mile. Sometimes that means getting parts from our sister companies and finding someone to bring them to the clients' site overnight. We can't do that in all cases, but we will do our best." An example of just how far Noxon takes its vision on service concerns a new chemical

plant in the Netherlands. The engineering company that won the order only received final confirmation on the Friday afternoon and needed to start work on the following Monday. Without even having had the time to compile a parts list they contacted Noxon and explained the predicament. In response to this request from a valued customer, Noxon put together a package of valves they thought would be needed and sent them to the construction site. The client simply took

the valves that were needed as construction work progressed and, on completion of the job, returned the remainder to Noxon's warehouse and paid for those that had been used. As Ms. Hermes says, this was an unusual order, but it does reveal how far Noxon will go to assist clients in need.

Finally, Mr. Dallau touches on the issue of e-commerce. He indicates that Noxon is continually up-

grading the functionality of its Internet site, which could soon provide clients with an extra, interactive service, such as direct quotations to their enquiries. Mr. Dallau: "It may take some time yet, but we anticipate a time when our products will be available via the Internet. Our drive in developing such a service is not to generate extra turnover, but to simplify and streamline the ordering process for both the customer as well as us. This will free up our sales staff who can then spend more time visiting clients and discussing their needs. In our future growth, issues such as service, flexibility and a personal touch will continue to be important to Noxon and our customers." ■



Cotubel's fitting warehouse.

FACTS & FIGURES

Noxon, founded in 1990, and companies in the same group are active in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France and Switzerland. Its product range includes tubes and pipes, valves, fittings, flanges, bars, profiles and sheets in stainless, 904L, duplex and nickel alloys, which are exported world-wide. Key markets include the chemical and petrochemical industry, the shipbuilding industry, pulp and paper mills, the offshore sector, the construction sector and food and dairy plants. The total group employs over 150 people. In 2002, its annual turnover was € 70.000.000,00. The QA system is according to ISO 9000:2000.



Investments in an in-house spectrometer enables chemical compositions and materials grades to be quickly checked.