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PARTING SHOT

Accounting For Installations

Anthony Rapanotti

I have chosen to utilize this column to comment on the subject of equipment installations, currently a very hot topic in our industry.

For some while, chain/multi-unit operators have been urging NAFEM to adopt a policy to provide them with quality, consistent and certified installations. Currently, there is no such commonality in the installation segment of our industry. Depending on which market end-users are in or the dealers from which they purchase, their installations may be performed by any of an assortment of people, including dealers, general contractors, rigging companies, service companies and others. It is not necessarily an authorized or certified company that gets these jobs because there is little or no emphasis placed today on demanding accountability for a properly executed install. This is true in part because customers will usually opt for the most economical installation process.

Herein lies the problem - exactly whose responsibility is an installation job, anyway? If you ask dealers, they will list factors such as price compression, competition and shrinking margins among their various reasons for omitting to take responsibility for installation services when bidding jobs. Service companies, on the other hand, will say that proper performance of equipment and the warranty is their responsibility and they should handle installations.

Until now, manufacturers and end-users have not demanded that any one entity be held accountable.

So, to answer my question, the answer is ... no one! Until now,



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manufacturers and end-users have not demanded that any one entity be held accountable. The current general practice is to get equipment installed in the quickest, most economical way possible and let authorized service companies deal with any subsequent warranty problems. This raises a different problem. Not only are such installations too often costly (to manufacturers and/or service companies), but they also reflect badly on all of us, not least because it leaves our customers scratching their heads!

It is for these reasons that, approximately a year and a half ago, CFESA formed its Installation committee, which I currently chair. Working together with NAFEM members' service managers, we have created the basis for an installation accountability program. At the 2004 NRA Show next month, members of this committee will be introducing our new "Installations: How To? Guide" presentation, complete with an average time (not price) estimating matrix, standardized site survey form, measurement and calculation work sheets, and much more.

I wish to point out that I am not blaming dealers for this current dilemma. There are many dealers that have extremely qualified installation people on their staffs. Nor am I suggesting that only service agents should perform installations. The blame for the current lack of accountability falls on our industry as a whole because we do not have a consistent, agreed-to, certified installation program in place. I am suggesting that manufacturers, dealers and service agents agree to partner on the installation of all hard-piped, hard-wired equipment. This way, a well-trained and qualified service technician should be able to anticipate a problem or mistake before it becomes the worst nightmare for all of us!

In my opinion, the math isn't even fuzzy - the cost of having a factory-trained or CFESA Certified technician present during the crucial installation process (at least on the larger hard-piped, hard-wired equipment) is far cheaper than the price of repairing the equipment later. Even more important may be the cost to repair the relationships with our customers, without whom we might as well shut our collective doors.

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