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Exclusive: Linde Europe North's coronavirus response

By Stephen B. Harrison | 16 June 2020

Every cloud has a silver lining. Whilst coronavirus (Covid-19) swept across Europe with devastating impact, Linde Europe North has witnessed the most heartwarming response to the situation within its organisation and in collaboration with its external partners.

Teamwork has supported the satisfaction of increased demand for medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients, and the way people have pulled together has been a shining example of how to respond in a crisis.

Kaisa Nieminen from Finland and Steen Sørensen from Denmark took 30 minutes out of their schedules to talk with **gasworld**. They explain how humanity has been shining over the Covid-19 clouds in recent months.



Source: Linde
Kaisa Nieminen

Kaisa, let's come to you first please. How has Linde Europe North been responding to Covid-19?

In the Healthcare segment, the business focus has been to ensure the necessary supply of medical oxygen to hospitals where Covid-19 patients are being treated.

What kind of things have you done to achieve that?

In the regional team, we have established a cross-functional collaboration. We have been working across the business lines and functions to ensure that we are sharing information, resources and assets to align our response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Coordinating the flow of information must be especially important with so much in flux...

Yes, absolutely. The regular lines of communication remain open and additionally, we have set up cross-functional focus teams. We continuously monitor guidelines on safe working practices, for example the requirements to inbound medical gas cylinders, before our staff handle them for refilling. The quality of our products and the health of our own people must not be compromised as we work as quickly as possible to navigate a safe path through these exceptional times.

There must have been many emotions flowing recently. What have you experienced personally, Kaisa?

We have been very fortunate in the Nordic countries that the Covid-19 has impacted us less than some other parts of Europe, that's a feeling of relief. We have been prepared to secure the supply, and our delivery drivers and production teams are ready for 24/7 operations. We at Linde value them highly as true heroes, every one of them.

So, as you might sense, my overwhelming emotion is pride. The collaboration that I have witnessed has been amazing. Everybody has responded to the urgency of the situation and focused on a single goal. I have always had confidence in Linde's potential to act in a crisis and this event has confirmed our readiness to respond.

Thanks, Kaisa. Steen what about you? As a veteran of the gases business, have you experienced anything like this before?

No, never. We have been able to achieve things which under 'normal' circumstances we would never have dreamt to be possible. The situation has really brought out the best in people and that comment applies to all the internal and external touch points that we have interacted with in the past few months.

Can you put an example around that please, Steen?

The lead time from customer enquiry to first fill of a bulk liquid medical oxygen storage tank would traditionally have been measured in months. For an installation that my team did at a Copenhagen hospital we compressed that to a week.

We confirmed the customer specifications, pulled together the bill of materials and just after the customer poured the concrete plinth, we got the cranes in to install the tank, connected the pipework from the tank to the hospital wards, received the external approvals and scheduled a bulk tanker in to do the first fill of liquid oxygen. All of that in a week – wow!

That's an amazing difference... months becoming days. How was that possible?

Quite simply having everybody focused on a common goal is the key. In the past we might have needed weeks to get the planning approvals from the regulatory authorities to validate a tank installation site. On this occasion, the hospital pulled hard to get the approvals done quickly and the results speak for themselves.

And how will that new medicinal liquid oxygen tank be used?



Source: Linde
Steen Sørensen

The hospital had been planning an extension with some new wards. Their original idea was to open the new parts of the hospital a few years from now. But due to the Coronavirus, they brought their timeline forward. So, they needed to equip the wards with oxygen gas piping and get a liquid tank on site quickly.



Source: Linde

Bisbebjerg hospital installation

You mention the piping there Steen, is that an area where your team has been busy?

Yes, that's right. I work in the Customer Engineering Services organisation. Some of us work outside to install the bulk storage tanks for customers and others work inside to hook the tank up to the hospital beds where the patients are administered the oxygen.

One of our main tasks has been to support hospitals with medical oxygen gas supply de-bottlenecking. Our engineers work their way from the tank to the beds looking at all the potential restrictions for oxygen supply. Perhaps the supply system needs a bigger pressure regulator or a new valve to increase the maximum flow during periods of peak demand. Or we could install a second pipe in parallel to the existing one to deliver more oxygen.

After we have completed the review, we get busy replacing the equipment or installing new gas lines to increase the capacity so that the doctors and nurses are able to treat more people.

And where does all that additional equipment come from? Do you hold stocks of these parts?

Yes, we do. But we have also been very creative. Let me give you a really touching example of how the whole community has pulled together. The tank we chose to use for that medical oxygen supply to the hospital in Copenhagen had been allocated to a different customer in our healthcare segment. But it was the perfect size for the job.

So, our sales team contacted the customer to ask if they would be OK to give up their place in the tank-queue for the benefit of the hospital. And we got the green light. We were relieved and happy, but not surprised. Externally people have been working with us as one team. And internally, we had our medical and industrial teams working together to get a speedy response in place for the hospital.

Steen – thank you for the time and the insights from behind the lines.

You're welcome. Working at speed whilst maintaining our focus on quality and safety has been a very rewarding experience. Sometimes I must remind people, we do this every day. Oxygen cylinders and liquid tanks – this is the beating heart of the industrial and medical gases business.

Kaisa – thank you also. I'll let you get on with the day job now.

Sure, thanks for getting in touch. It's good to be able to share a positive story about the efforts the team are making in these difficult times, I'm so proud of them.