Containers Special Section

production period of about two years, Payne said.

Each time a contract is awarded for a container or cask, an audit of the manufacturer’s NQA-1 program is conducted by the customer. This can result in several audits of the same company for similar orders. Manship pointed out that if his company receives an order from a DOE laboratory, an audit of MTM’s program will be conducted by that lab. If another lab in the DOE complex places a similar order, however, that lab will also conduct its own audit. To remove this apparent redundancy and streamline the process, Manship said, MTM and other manufacturing companies have been pushing for the establishment of a governing body within the DOE to standardize the NQA-1 auditing process.

Noting that customers such as the DOE and nuclear utilities are being held accountable to their stakeholders, Pac-Tec’s Smart said that his company welcomes whatever quality assurance requirements are asked of them. “We welcome it because it is important,” he said. “That’s not to say you want it to be inefficient and expensive, but you don’t want to cut corners.”

Workforce

Manufacturing issues and NQA-1 compliance are not the only challenges facing package makers. Like much of the rest of the nuclear industry, fabricators are facing an aging workforce and a dearth of skilled craftspeople to take their place. “Young people today are just not interested in becoming welders,” said Dwight Campbell, president of Container Products Corporation (CPC).

Campbell said that his company is looking into building an internship program to attract new talent, but for now CPC’s main focus is working with local community colleges that offer welding programs. In addition to recruiting community college graduates, CPC donates much of its scrap metal to the colleges to provide students with material that they can use to practice different welding techniques. Campbell said that being based in Wilmington, N.C., many of the welding program students come from a military background.

Payne, likewise, said that while his company generally has not had a problem finding talented engineers, the ability to recruit skilled craftspeople, including welders and machinists, is a major concern. While Wagstaff is currently well staffed with around 450 employees, Payne said that in the next 10 years, the company expects to lose about 45 percent of its staff based on anticipated retirements, not including natural attrition and loss. “That is huge,” he said. “Inside of 10 years we will essentially need to hire and train, without any expansion, 200 people.” In addition to being very active in working with community colleges and trade schools, Wagstaff has implemented an internship program to attract and train craftspeople, Payne said.

MTM, which is based in Indianapolis, Ind., announced in October 2019 that it was working with Vincennes University to establish the second Indiana Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (INFADE) initiative in the state to prepare students for careers in advanced manufacturing. Through the initiative, students will be trained in automation, robotics, and other aspects of advanced manufacturing. The first class of INFADE students was expected to start this fall.

Maintaining a workforce to meet demand is likely to continue to be a pressing issue, as many manufacturers are seeing a growing demand for radioactive waste packages as more nuclear power plants are moving into decommissioning and governments around the world step up the cleanup of their legacy waste sites. Given the ability to secure those skilled workers, however, the package industry is ready to meet those decommissioning and cleanup challenges. “Our basic philosophy is, if it fits, it ships, without any expansion, 200 people.” In addition to being very active in working with community colleges and trade schools, Wagstaff has implemented an internship program to attract and train craftspeople, Payne said.

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