Shedding light on the invisible industry
BCGA Annual Conference 2015
Manchester, UK, 23rd April

The BCGA Annual Conference 2015 was held at the Marriott Hotel and Country Club at Worsley Park, Manchester in April for the second successive year and once more equalled its record attendance, welcoming around 140 delegates. The flagship event for the BCGA (British Compressed Gases Association), the conference addressed safety and developments in what it coined, ‘The Invisible Industry.’

As current President Richard Gearing (BOC) explained in his opening speech, “Whether life saving, life enhancing or life promoting, industrial gases are essential to the existence and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of people in the UK every day. Our gases and products support many strategic industry sectors that truly underpin the UK economy.”

“The industrial gases sector has traditionally been low-key, rarely seeking the limelight for its activities – but things are changing. Increasingly, our companies are pioneering technologies that will be fundamental to the future prosperity of the UK…”

Industry developments
The theme of invisibility was carried throughout the day’s agenda, as the conference sought to highlight the often unseen progress made in the industry’s regulation and safe usage in end-user applications. This began in earnest with a review of the BCGA’s Technical Committees’ publications and achievements. Technical Manager Jake Lake, along with Rob Thorley and David Hopper – representing two of the associations’ Technical Sub Committees (TSC) – provided a round-up of technical committee reports and key changes over the last 12 months. In fact, gazworld understands that second-half 2014 proved to be a ‘particularly busy’ period for all involved and there are now no less than 86 documents published and available from the BCGA.

The agenda then turned towards developments in the industry as a whole, with Dr. Graham Cooley, CEO of ITM Power, discussing Power-to-Gas: Storing Renewable Energy in the Gas Grid. Cooley described the challenges facing the energy sector and how it will need to adapt in the future, including some compelling statistics in favour of the Power-to-Gas business. With hydrogen able to be stored easily in the gas grid, unlike electricity, Power-to-Gas presents an efficient, low-cost and long-term solution. Indeed, ITM Power itself has recently secured a £4.8m strategic investment from JCB, highlighting the growing interest in this market.

Luxfer Cylinders’ Mike Clinch then explored advances in lightweight cylinder technology and the trend towards more integrated, system-level, design approaches – often extolling the virtues of aluminium not only in a range of commercial applications, but also in the quest for the safest, lightest and most effective cylinders. It was an interesting aside to hear that the Luxfer name actually originates from the Latin term ‘to carry light’ and comes from the company’s foundations in the manufacture of glass prisms; one might argue that with its advances in lightweight cylinders, usage of the term ‘to carry light’ takes on a whole new context.

Other highlights on the speaking programme included an engaging Tanker Roll-Over Prevention Training presentation from Dean Jordan, Director for GRidel Ltd, Helium Supply – A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy by Richard Clark, independent consultant and a fellow of the Institution of chemical engineers, and an exploration of The Landscape of the UK Brewing Industry Today by Stephen Livens, Policy Manager for the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA).

Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) Alison Evans provided an update on the crackdown on metal theft (and gas cylinders), a campaign which gazworld understands proved highly successful with around a 40% reduction in metal theft achieved between 2011-2014. The challenge, as far as the BCGA is concerned, is to maintain vigilance in this area in the future. And BOC’s Peter Henrys, also Chairman of the BCGAs TSC 7, gave an informative presentation about The Air We Are Given to Breathe. Henrys took delegates on something of a journey through human biology and the role of gases such as oxygen and carbon dioxide in a range of bodily functions like the respiratory system – as well as medical procedures and applications.

One of the day’s final presentations saw the BCGAs own Doug Thornton, Chief Executive, take to the stage to cover a regular thorn in the association’s side – gas abuse and the media. Thornton outlined some of the work the BCGA has been doing behind the scenes and with government departments, the media and other agencies to try and curb the sometimes sensitive issues around gas abuse. “Trade associations can make a difference with this if we engage with media and other organisations,” he explained. “Let’s continue to be vigilant.”

In good health
With the programme and plaudits played out, it was down to Gearing to close the conference, an event which attracted representatives from both the HSE (Health & Safety Executive) and DfT (Department for Transport).

He concluded, “Well, I hope you enjoyed that today, I certainly did and I’m delighted that the variety and quality of the speakers met our expectations… Make sure you save the date in your diary for next year’s event, we look forward to seeing you there.”

With another ‘best ever’ event under its belt, 86+ publications published and up-to-date, and a membership (81) that pleases the association in both its quality and quantity, the BCGA is clearly in good health as it looks ahead to the 2016 Annual Conference in Leeds next April.

SAVE THE DATE
The BCGA Annual Conference 2016 will take place on 25th April, returning to Oulton Hall in Leeds (UK). www.bcga.co.uk

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