

Serco improves thermal properties of refrigerated truck panels

Serco has invested in a new injection polyurethane foaming plant at its factory in Durban which is expected to improve the thermal properties of the insulated panels the company uses for its refrigerated truck bodies and trailers.



Managing director of Serco, Clinton Holcroft says there is a continuing trend to improve control of the cold chain using telematics and remote temperature monitoring systems.

Serco's long-standing partnership with telematics company Ikhaya Automation has kept the company up to speed with the latest innovations.

Stringent health laws on food safety made traceability in the cold chain essential. Added to this, the current challenging economic climate meant transporters and retailers were under increasing pressure to find ways of reducing waste and return, as well as to provide accurate data in the event of insurance claims for rejected loads which are out of temperature specification.

Temperature monitoring solutions becoming the norm

Holcroft adds that, recently, local standards had been increased whereby pharmaceutical products now had to be transported in insulated vehicles. This follows trends in Europe whereby temperature monitoring solutions are becoming the norm for perishable goods and pharmaceutical products.

“Having a web-based temperature monitoring system, allows transporters to be able to take immediate action should the temperature vary from the set level. Spin-offs include reduced risk of loss as early detection can assist in resolving problems proactively.”

The system, developed by Ikhaya for refrigerated vehicles, allows operators to set pre-determined temperature zones for each load and provides alerts via email or SMS.

History of data, graphical reports

The system records a history of data and generates graphical reports either on request or at set intervals to email for easy analysis. A major advantage of the system is peace of mind and the relatively low cost compared to other products.

“The alerts that the system sends out when things go wrong are vital,” said Holcroft. “For example, let’s say a customer wants a load of fresh produce transported between Durban and Johannesburg to arrive at a temperature of between -18°C and -20°C. If there is no monitoring system and something goes amiss causing the temperature to be between -12°C and -15°C on arrival, the customer either rejects the load and the transporter has an insurance claim against it or the customer accepts the consignment and possibly the shelf life is compromised meaning the retailer ends up with losses while the customer loses confidence in the store.”

Holcroft says Serco builds a large quantity of refrigerated trucks and trailers for large retailers and supermarkets such as Shoprite which uses trailers fitted with insulated roll over doors and multi-temperature load dividers. Shoprite is very aware of maintaining the cold chain efficiently, and are also in the process of installing temperature monitoring solutions.

“The new panels are already being manufactured and they will set new standards compared to previous,” he concludes.

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