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Facts at Your Fingertips:

Selecting a Heat-Transfer Fluid Supplier

Access Intelligence

Selecting a Heat-Transfer Fluid Supplier

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Lean workforces are the norm in current plant environments. In the context of heat exchange systems, the current situation amplifies the need to select a heat-transfer fluid supplier with the expertise and technical resources to handle non-routine circumstances. This one-page reference outlines questions that operating companies should consider when selecting a supplier.

Beyond fluid, choosing a supplier with reliable service and supply is key

Product options

Products backed by years of history and consistency of published data carry less technical risk. Early in project cycles, fluid selection often requires close collaboration with fluid experts to select the optimal chemistry to meet heat-duty demands, provide longevity with low lifecycle costs, and limit risks for operational and process safety. Allowing a heat-transfer system to be a testing ground for inexperienced vendors or products that are unproven in the given application presents significant risks. Suppliers with broad experience with established fluids in varying applications mitigate that risk. Consider the value of using a supplier with a large portfolio, proven technical data and properties, and a variety of chemistries from which to choose.

Distribution network

Each day of lost production while waiting for heat-transfer fluid to arrive can be extremely costly, so the value of a good distribution network that will provide product sourcing from strategically located distribution points is critical. The ability to provide products to all key markets and regions is the mark of a supplier invested in customer support. It is also a leading indicator of the supplier's ability to provide emergency supplies of fluid when needed.

Customer support

Ensure the supplier provides 24/7 customer service access. Immediate accessibility empowers the supplier's team to respond quickly to a user in need. They must also be able to ensure the fluid can be off-loaded into the system without delay. This requires experienced customer service representatives who ask the right questions and understand necessary equipment, such as pumps, lengths of hose, and proper fittings. Fluid users should be able to leverage these key resources at no added cost.

Product quality

Reliable fluid quality is key to meeting performance expectations. Failing to meet requirements may not only cause the fluid to fail to work as intended, but could also result in costly added downtime or added safety risks to personnel. Certificates of analysis indicate the required specifications that must be met by the fluid manufacturer. When choosing a manufacturer, consider the added value of using only those that have ISO 9001 quality-management-system certification or equivalent. This can protect the user from any potential deviations. These quality systems carry considerable cost to maintain by the manufacturer, so the added assurance to users is of great value.

Technical expertise

When facing a potentially costly problem, having a dependable source of expertise is critical for finding an effective resolution while saving valuable time. This can only be offered by a fluid manufacturer with adequate staff to manufacture and support problem-free, high-quality products. When considering candidate fluid suppliers, ensure they offer the technical expertise needed. Pay special attention to the number of support engineers on staff, their tenure, and evidence of practical experience in industry leadership via publications, conference presentations and webinars, industry-standard development, and more. A well-staffed team with the right expertise can help identify and resolve issues faster, restoring heat transfer fluid and system integrity more quickly while avoiding a costly trial-and-error approach.

Support services

During routine operation, systems should continue to benefit from the support services available from reputable suppliers, including fluid-quality monitoring by competent laboratories that test the key quality parameters of a fluid for indicative trends and provide early-alert warnings to identify potential problems before they develop. There are several aspects of support that should be considered: Get design and modification review support from the fluid experts in modifications to a heat-transfer fluid system; get support on fluid disposal; get product training, start-up support, and troubleshooting support.

Reputation

To ensure you receive all the benefits mentioned, choose a preferred fluid supplier with a solid reputation. When making a decision, gather testimonials from heater and equipment manufacturers and other fluid users. The best fluid manufacturers understand the value they can create for growing business and will invest their resources into maintaining their reputation. This is accomplished through prompt and excellent customer support, creating the win-win environment heat-transfer-fluid users desire. ■

Editor's note: The content in this column was contributed by Eastman Chemical Co.

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