

A busy day at Sorevco

NO PLACE FOR RUST

Galvanized coils of steel roll out from huge factory doors to be transported all over Canada. Business is tough but good: as long as production runs smoothly. That's where Konecranes comes into the picture.

Production is running as planned at Sorevco zinc coating plant. The Canadian weather is cold, but it is very warm inside the plant. The furnace is glowing at a respectable 2300 degrees Fahrenheit (1260° Celcius).

At the other end of the factory, a heavy 27.5 ton crane is unloading big steel coils from an 18 wheel truck. The coils are fed into the galvanizing process: unrolled and run up to 350 feet a minute through the furnace, before they get dipped into a zinc pit. The steel is honed to the perfect form to satisfy the customer's needs before it's curled up into a coil again. Then the coils are loaded onto another 18 wheeler. It took a lot of work to get the process into its current procedure. Watching it leaves you in awe.

24/7 – no pauses

We are given a factory tour by **Pat Horan**, Sorevco's mechanical specialist. Sorevco utilizes several cranes in the factory. "We have two large 27.5-ton cranes in the warehouse, which

take care of the coil-handling. The other cranes are mainly used to lift maintenance equipment, and they range from one to 40 tons."

The two large cranes, running high over the warehouse are, of course, the most important. They carry the heavy workload that keeps Sorevco in business.

"These cranes were purchased from a steel mill in the United States. They hadn't been used for 10 years, so we checked them and found them mechanically sound. If one breaks down, we are still able to operate with the other. It just slows things down."

And slowdowns are, of course, costly. Time is money. Sorevco operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. To have a broken crane means severe production loss. Everything has to be looked after at regular intervals. "Reliability is extremely important to us. The safety of the workers is a high priority. Nobody wants to have 20 tons of steel land on his feet."

Horan explains how they used to organize the inspections and maintenance services; how they were always busy looking for different solutions to suit both the needs of Sorevco's production schedule, and the timetables of the inspection crews. Today the schedules with Konecranes are fixed. "Price, service and respecting schedules are important to me. Our contract with Konecranes means I don't have to search for capable people, and that's good because I have a multitude of things to do."

The two 27.5-ton cranes are made by Cleveland Crane and P&H Harnishfeger. The other cranes include such brands as Demag, Budgit, Larco, Shawbox and Kito. None of Sorevco's

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16 cranes are actually manufactured by Konecranes. When Horan hears that 75 percent of the cranes serviced by Konecranes are made by other manufacturers, he is both surprised and not.

"Konecranes maintains the cranes as they would their own. I value familiarity, and they know us, our cranes and our demands. It makes everything easier and I can rely on them. They build, repair and inspect cranes. They are the experts we need to have our cranes in top operating condition."

No pain no gain

Sorevco has two mechanics of their own, but their workload is nowadays focused elsewhere. "We have the rest of the line to worry about, such as welding and metal shutdowns, that's enough for us. Konecranes deals with the bigger problems, so that we can concentrate on our own business. We are not equipped for anything really special or demanding."

Sorevco used to do more in-house repairs, only the very demanding projects were outsourced. The cooperation between the two companies has been on an intermittent basis since 1991, when Sorevco's first cranes were installed.

"I've been working with Konecranes since the beginning, but a big change took place in 2000. One of our 27.5-ton cranes required new 24 inch wheels. Konecranes promised to do it in five days, but ended up doing it in four."

Since then the two companies have become close.

"The cranes are operating well now. I do all the analyses on the gearboxes and the other inspections every two months. I have a weekly to-do list: extensive inspections of cranes including technical and electrical evaluation. We also do electrical upgrades and mechanical maintenance ourselves."

Maximum capacity

After the factory tour, we meet **Gilles Lahaie**, the general manager of Sorevco. The business is demanding, but Lahaie has something special in his hands. Sorevco is the only Quebec-based company producing galvanized steel coils. It doesn't mean, however, that good deals are a matter of course.

"This business is very volatile. One year is good, another is not. The 1990s were good times and 2004 was good, too. It was a boom year – demand was high and prices went up. In fact, it was the best year we've had so far: production reached 225,000 tons and that's a lot of coils."

Coils are shipped all over Canada. "Our primary customers are in the construction market. We produce galvanized steel coils ranging from six to 25 tons. 98 percent of sales remain in Canada – about 80 percent here in Quebec or Ontario, but we ship across the whole country, from Vancouver to Maritimes.

Lahaie has 62 employees. Before, when it was an independent company, deals with steel suppliers and customers were all organized by Sorevco. Today it is part of ArcelorMittal, the largest metal company in the world.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **VESA ESKOLA**

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Business from person to person

Konecranes' office is in the outskirts of Montreal – just by the international airport. Being close to an airport is not so important, more crucial is the excellent road network. The branch office is the busiest in Canada.

The office is run by **Nick Georgas**. He knows Sorevco's case very well – even if Sorevco is one of 370 companies he's in charge of.

"Pat Horan knows his cranes extremely well. He has a couple of favorite mechanics who have been with us over 20 years. That's what this business is about: good long-term customer relations."

Georgas says that familiarity is good, because Sorevco's two 27.5 ton cranes are not young anymore. "It's older technology – they are DC cranes. A lot of newer guys would be intimidated by them.

The fact that none of the cranes are our own doesn't matter – we do all makes. It has always been the company philosophy."

Sorevco's cranes are one of the busiest for Georgas. "Those cranes are heavily utilized. Sure, there are bigger cranes around. Paper mills typically have 60-ton cranes, and some of our customers even have 100-ton cranes. But they are not used as often as Sorevco's.

Keeping them in good working order saves a lot of money. It's not just because breakdowns are costly, but because the parts are expensive, too."

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