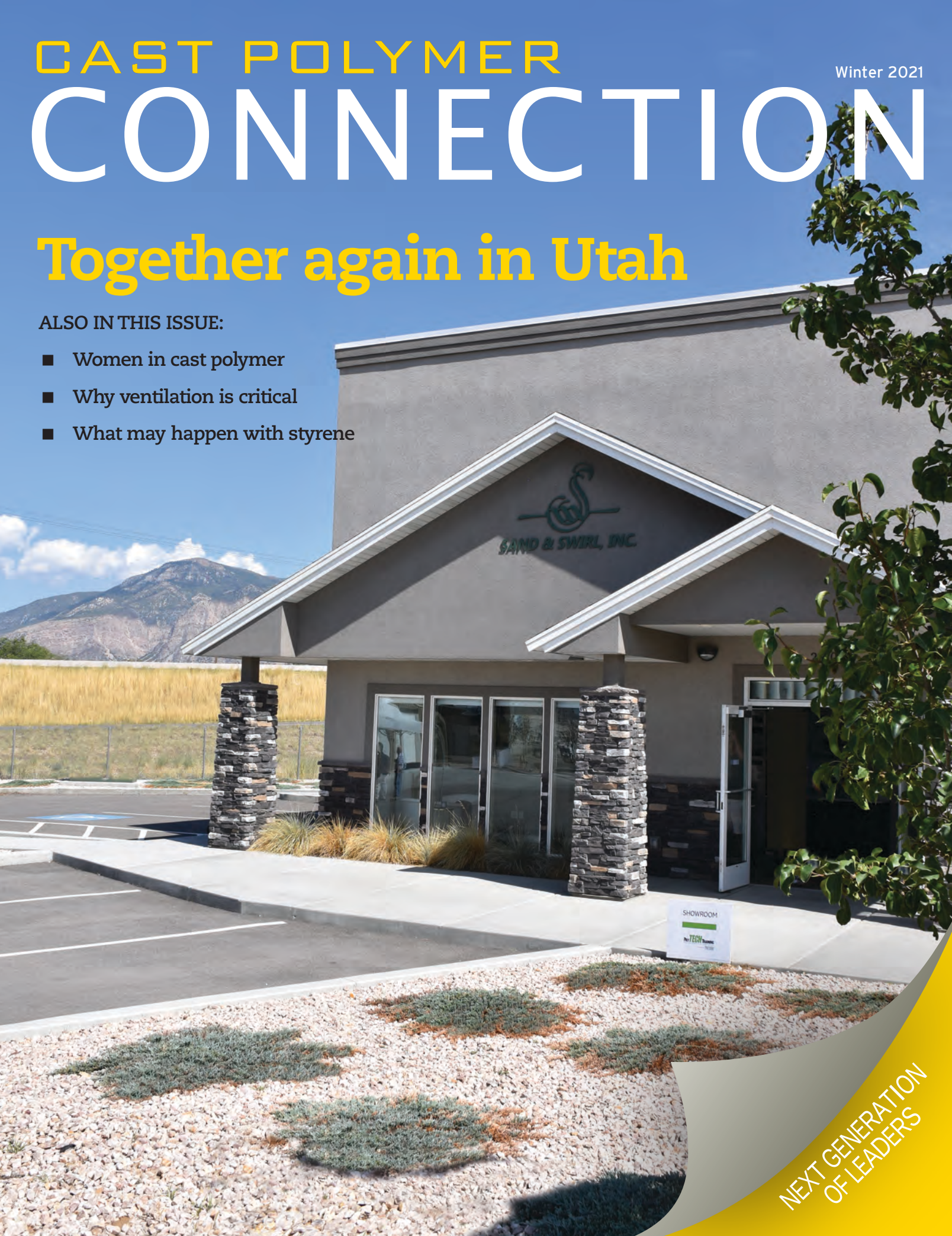
CAST POLYMER
# CONNECTION
Winter 2021

## Together again in Utah

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Women in cast polymer
- Why ventilation is critical
- What may happen with styrene




NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...



**ON THE COVER:**
**The beautiful state of Utah was home to POLYCON 2021. Pictured on the cover is the headquarters/showroom of one of the co-hosts, Sand & Swirl in Ogden, UT. Attendees toured the showroom and attended technical demonstrations and learning sessions in that building's meeting rooms as well as in the factory next door. The other co-host was Tyvarian in Lindon, UT. Coverage begins on 13.**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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# The buzz of enthusiasm

**The excitement in the air at our successful POLYCON 2021 in my neck of the woods last September was abundant.** Although we had a few potential attendees who had to cancel last minute because the pandemic is not yet over, the event brought in more than 140 registrants from different areas of the country.

The enthusiasm of attendees was evident everywhere—from the meet and greets as we ran into old friends to sessions filled with people eager to learn to social events and the exhibit hall where we reaffirmed friendships and made new connections. We were delighted to be face to face, and we had a couple years' worth of stories built up about the hardships and challenges of the past few years. As this association is so good at doing, we shared how we fared, and we came away stronger because of that sharing.

> WE HAD A COUPLE YEARS' WORTH OF STORIES BUILT UP ABOUT THE HARDSHIPS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PAST FEW YEARS...

A few personal highlights for me included: *The first-ever women's roundtable*. I am very pleased to see how many women are now an integral part of this industry. Having us all together in one place made us realize not only how strong a role we play in the association, but also how diverse our paths have been as we faced some of the same challenges. **Cast Polymer Connection's** executive editor Genilee Parente contacted some of those attendees for a feature that illustrates where women in our industry stand today. I look forward to future get-togethers and I hope we can grow the Facebook page that came out of that session (see News to Know for details).

*An outstanding PolyTECH training program*. We had two days devoted this year to watching hands-on demonstrations and listening to advice about how to make our products better as well as what new markets might exist and how to reach them. What's more, this year, we didn't have to force the tough choices of the past: there were multiple opportunities to attend our choices and many sessions were videotaped so we could make them available to attendees after POLYCON (see News to Know for details).

*A busy exhibit hall*. We gathered together in the exhibit hall several times to walk table to table, finding out what new products and services are available from our industry's suppliers. I know that for those suppliers, this year's event reminded them how much better business can be conducted across a table rather than a telephone line or an Internet chat.

Among the stories in this issue are a few highlights from specific sessions such as an outstanding gathering of the next generation of leaders and a keynote speech that was one of the most inspiring stories we've heard in a long time. Coverage begins on page 13.

This issue is also devoted to regulatory issues. Kelly DeBusk, Composites Compliance, and John Schweitzer, American Composites Manufacturers Association, worked together on a heavily attended POLYCON session on styrene developments. Kelly followed that session up with a story on ventilation basics, and John Schweitzer wrote a column on what may happen in the future.

I won't have the pleasure of serving as your host for the next event (or the worn-out shoes to prove how exhausting hosting can be!). But I can tell you how much I look forward to visiting the state of Ohio next year for POLYCON 2022. I'm sure it will be even better than this year. See you then. ■

**ReBecca Erdmann**
ICPA President
Co-owner, Sand & Swirl

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# The WOMEN of ICPA

BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE

**AT A SPECIAL ROUNDTABLE SESSION DURING POLYCON 2021, 17 PEOPLE SAT AROUND A TABLE, NIBBLING CHEESE AND SIPPING WINE AND SOFT DRINKS.** That's not unusual for ICPA: roundtable discussions are an intimate and important part of every annual event. What was different about this gathering was that all the attendees were women. They gathered for the first time as a group to exchange business tips and stories about being part of the feminine side of the association and industry, a side that has been growing steadily over the years and has evolved tremendously during that time.

"When John and I joined the association in 1989, the women at the show were wives. We had our own program to entertain us that had nothing to do with the business," Bonnie Webster, vice president of Monroe Industries, Avon, NY, explains.

Webster runs Monroe jointly with her husband John Webster. The two were high school sweethearts who married in 1988, and their faces have been a familiar part of the cast polymer industry, ICPA, and its annual meetings ever since. Both have been active in the association for many years—Bonnie helping with lobbying efforts, among many volunteer efforts, and John serving as president.

Bonnie had a successful career with Rochester Institute of Technology before deciding in 2001 to join John in the business. John was taking over the company from his parents and by 2004, Bonnie decided to put the skills she'd acquired from her career to work full time for Monroe. She now handles human resources, payables, receivables, payroll and showroom sales while John handles the day-to-day technical side of manufacturing the product.

Angel Kruse (left) met with Lafayette Marble employees Melony Domingue and Hal Clark in the POLYCON exhibit hall.

That arrangement, it turns out from comments gathered for this article, is a common one today.

Nicole Hamilton helps to run The Bath Collection, Vero Beach, FL, with her husband Chad. Chad's parents had a successful marble business from 1971 to 2017 when they retired. Nicole married Chad in 2014 and in 2017, she joined the family business ready to help her husband take over the day-to-day operations.

"I have a background in accounting and currently own a seasonal tax accounting firm. I've used my business degree and finance knowledge to help Chad. I try to oversee all operations while my husband oversees the production and installation of our product," she explains.

In Colorado Springs, CO, April Sauer now helps her husband J.D. Sauer run Manstone LLC. J.D. has an extensive background in cast polymer/solid surface manufacturing while April's background is in marketing, a background she has used to bring Manstone up to speed in modern marketing practices.

"I came to the cast polymer industry because J.D. (the couple has been married 30 years) has had a long career in the industry. I started getting involved in 2001 when I designed our first website then went on to different marketing/communications projects part time until I went to work full time in 2015." Today, she's marketing and sales manager of the company. She is also an ICPA board member since 2020 and serves on the marketing and membership committees.

## The balancing act and other challenges

For women who have found their path of entry through a partnership with their husbands, one of the greatest challenges is learning to balance their personal/professional lives.

April Sauer explains that for her, she needed to learn the manufacturing side of the business to better help the company.

The women enjoyed a warm Utah day during POLYCON 2021 Salt Lake City while sharing their thoughts on being in the cast polymer business.

"This is a very unique industry," she explains. To be able to produce the quality products that make companies successful requires knowing both the technical side of how cast polymer or solid surfaces are made and knowing how to operate to make a profit.

"Having knowledge of how the material is manufactured as well as its uses and the benefits over other types of surface materials has been instrumental in determining how best to market and sell to consumers," she explains.

The challenge of balance also includes finding time for both family and the business.

Crystal Smith attended the women's roundtable on behalf of new member Lone Star Surface LLC, Texline, TX, which she helps to operate in conjunction with her husband Mervin. The two just recently purchased their cultured marble business from a family near Alamosa, CO and are operating the business in a "very small corner of our brother-in-law's shop."

The couple works together in the business with Crystal helping to form up, pour, clean up, sand, polish and install as well as doing the billing and other business operations.

But that's only part of both of their jobs. Mervin is still doing side jobs in the handyman business so that they can get the business going, and the family has four children, ages 2 to 11, who are often with them at the shop.

Crystal puts lunch in the oven or crockpot before she leaves in the morning. Then, "We like to have everything poured by noon so I don't have to come back to the shop," Crystal explains. The afternoon is spent cleaning, gardening, canning and getting dinner around with the whole family pitching in to help around the house.

"It takes a lot of energy just to keep everything functioning sanely," she says.

## Knowing your stuff

For both women who have come into the industry via family businesses and those climbing the ranks of a corporation or small business, one of the challenges over the years has been proving technical know-how.

"My biggest struggle over the years has been working with contractors that didn't take my knowledge seriously," Bonnie Webster says. However, "that has certainly changed over time," she adds.

Fateme Ghahary is president of Safas Corporation, Clifton, NJ, a new ICPA member that makes and sells decorative materials for the molded and cast polymer industries. Safas is a family business founded by her father Dr. Akbar Ghahary. The daughter took over in 2014 following the sudden death of her father, but she already had two decades of experience rising through the ranks of the company via marketing, administration, then leadership positions.

She says that during this 30-year career, one of the greatest challenges has been "proving I had the expertise to assist customers in figuring out what they need from us and how much more they can do with our product line," she says. She's been able to bolster that belief through taking high-profile projects that have proven the product line's superiority and by "having the 'chops' to take Safas to the

next level," she says.

Many people in ICPA know the face of Angel Kuse from another ICPA supplier member, J.M. Huber Corporation, headquartered in Edison, NJ. Kuse has a long history (28 years) with Huber, starting as a lab secretary in 1993, then working in production as a scale clerk, customer care for a warehouse operation, management of a quality lab and finally transitioning to sales about six years ago. She's currently a regional sales manager for the midwest.

Kuse said this long history and her hands-on experience are one reason her customers have faith in her today.

"Not many people and also not many women know how to make cultured marble/granite/solid surface. It's a unique process and a unique industry, which makes my career fun and challenging," she says.

The requirement to be able to prove oneself is just as true in the part of the industry that makes the cast polymer products themselves. Melony Domingue is general manager for the marble operations of Lafayette Marble & Granite, Lafayette, LA. Domingue started in the business in 1994 with no experience or knowledge, then worked her way up to become the manager of 16 team members.

"The challenge I have had to overcome in this industry is convincing customers I know my job and what I'm talking about, especially with older customers. You have to learn to take the time to reassure them," she says, and the key is "having great bosses that push you to do better, that appreciate you and make coming to work a pleasure."

Stephanie Villanueva also has a long history with the industry that began very hands-on: she has 21 years with Custom Marble, Caldwell, ID. Her parents owned the company from 1993 to 2016, and when they sold the business, she went to work for the current owner Bryce Peterson.

Crystal and Merv Smith recently started an operation within a relative's shop while balancing a family that includes four young children.

"I grew up helping my parents around the shop with little projects after school and on the weekends then became an employee when I was in high school. I started out doing things no one else wanted to do." However, she's been rising through the ranks ever since and became production manager in 2016.

Villanueva says that through those years, her biggest challenge has always been "trying to hold my own as a woman working in a man's field of work. You weren't taken seriously most of the time so it took me years before our regular contractors would deal with me on projects, questions or bidding," she says.

**"One belief … all the women shared was that opportunity exists within the business … and the industry is a good one for both genders …"**

In the last few years, she's seen an improvement in that situation "but it is still an issue when interviewing potential candidates. You can see it in their face and body language they don't like the fact I will be their manager." She's also heard comments on construction sites about the fact she should be home "cooking and cleaning;" however, "patience and determination" are winning out these days, she says.

Nicole Hamilton agrees that the situation has improved, but adds that "construction is a challenge in general for women. Personalities are intense and mainly male driven. We have to learn that our professionalism is different than the strong males in the industry."

## Why the industry is good for women

Although it's not always been smooth sailing for the women in cast polymer, one belief that all of the women who contributed to this article and at that roundtable agreed upon is that opportunity exists within the business and the industry is a good one for both genders.

"Producing cultured marble isn't just a job. It's an art," Stephanie Villanueva says. "There are endless possibilities on what you can create. I've had many fun moments throughout my career where we created custom pieces not knowing whether they would work but trying nonetheless. It gives you a sense of accomplishment once you see the whole project come together and you know you played a valuable role," she says.

If she was asked for advice from a younger woman on entering the industry "I would tell her not to shy away or feel intimidated by this line of work. It is a growing industry. Women tend to have greater attention to details when it

comes to certain tasks, and I personally believe women are an asset not just on the customer service side, but on the production and install sides as well."

Fateme Ghahary agrees that opportunity abounds and adds that "there is pride and satisfaction in making raw materials that are used in a product you see out in the world." However, she also adds that "Manufacturing is a tough, dirty, sort of sexist and unglamorous business most of the time. You really must like the soup-to-nuts process to want to be in this industry."

April and J.D. Sauer, who work side by side at Manstone, picked up many tips at this year's POLYCON.

Her advice to women considering getting into the work is "you need to have grit, a thick skin, good communication skills, be resourceful, be creative and like to work with your hands. But there is no other job as satisfying."

Melony Domingue believes "our industry is an everyday learning career opportunity. There is always something new to learn," which keeps the job both interesting and challenging. For her, part of the fun is the interaction with customers. She spends much time in Lafayette's showroom helping clients pick out materials and understand the product. "Every customer is different, and showing them what the outcome will be is satisfying. You make friends that last a long time after a project is done," she says.

Like Domingue, Angel Kuse said a key to a successful career is having good bosses. She was trained by Jeff Nally who she credits with providing some of the knowledge in the cast polymer industry that enabled her to build up her reputation for knowing what's she's doing. She learned by listening, and Kuse says the business "is an intimate group with a passion for their industry. This gives me the motivation to serve my customers the best I can."

Nicole Hamilton adds that "the best and worse thing about this business is the lack of competition [other companies who make the same product] in some areas. This lack can be favorable when the consumer knows about your product and seeks you out, but with new homeowners that haven't worked with cultured marble before, they don't know what our product can do. We have to educate the public more on our product and make them more aware we are American made," she says.


Bonnie Webster (left) visited with Nicole Hamilton (middle) and her husband Chad at one of the POLYCON's demo sessions.

## The value of networking

The attendees at this year's special session for women felt that the roundtable was key to starting a new branch they'd like to see grow: feminine networking. After the session, the group formed a Facebook page where they hope to continue discussing issues of the industry (the name of the Facebook group is: ICPA Women in Manufacturing).

"Women can learn to navigate the business from others in the industry, including other women. It helps to know you are not alone and it's been refreshing to hear how others overcome obstacles in the business," Nicole Hamilton comments.

Melony Domingue adds that, "There are a lot of things from a woman's perspective that customers want that some men don't understand well," she says, such as what materials make a kitchen or bath both durable and low maintenance and what makes a room beautiful.

Fatime Ghahary adds that: "Women are at their prime when they can exchange ideas and talk about things. Their male counterparts are not necessarily good listeners" so bouncing ideas around and lending moral support among females is emotionally rewarding and can lead to innovation.

Angel Kuse also points out that "women are competitive with other women by nature. When we network, we challenge each other to be better." ■

**GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE** is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She welcomes story ideas from readers. Send them to gsparente@verizon.net.

# VENTILATION BASICS

## Knowing the basics can help with ventilation issues

BY KELLY DEBUSK

**IN THE CURRENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT, MANUFACTURING AND INDUSTRY SECTORS FACE AN UPSURGE IN REGULATIONS** coming from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and local government entities. Many of these regulations have the potential to be detrimental to the day-to-day operations of the cultured marble and solid surface industries. For that reason, understanding the basics of the systems affected is critical.

### Why ventilation is critical right now: Styrene

President Obama signed the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act into law on June 22, 2016. The law is an amendment to the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA) of 1976 that creates a mandatory requirement for EPA to conduct a risk-based assessment for existing chemicals and to provide an enforceable deadline for each of these assessments. TSCA directs EPA to focus first on chemicals listed in the 2014 Chemical Substances Work Plan, which includes styrene. That means styrene could be slated for TSCA review as early as next year when the next series of chemicals will begin the risk-assessment process. Under the law, the latest review of styrene would begin in 2028.

In anticipation of this TSCA review, now is the time to look at ventilation in our plants so companies can have a better understanding of how to communicate with ventilation design teams and can participate in creating the most efficient systems for each individual facility.

### The analysis

So, what's the first thing companies should do when thinking about installing a new ventilation system or upgrading an existing system? They should conduct a risk assessment that evaluates issues such as: Is the likely styrene exposure to an employee over the current allowable permissible exposure limit (PEL) based on a time weighted average (TWA) of eight hours? The current PEL is 100 parts per million (ppm); however, the TSCA process could potentially lower this limit considerably.

Cultured marble and solid surface companies want to know: Is the exposure potential there? For most companies, the answer to this question is yes unless they are processing extremely low volumes. But the only way to know for sure if a production area or facility is over the allowable PEL is to conduct styrene testing.

Several methods for styrene testing are available to companies, from styrene vapor badges and gas detectors with integrated photoionization sensors for volatile organic compound detection, to hiring outside companies to do independent testing or using OSHA's voluntary compliance program to conduct testing. (This program is a free service, but a company has to have a specific deadline to meet should testing show non-compliance.)

Once a risk has been determined, OSHA has a hierarchy of exposure control methods to use. The first is to assess if the hazard can be eliminated. Second, substitution for the chemical in question should be considered. Presently, suppliers have not been able to cost-effectively eliminate or replace styrene in resins and gel coats. This chemical is an integral part of the cross-linking process to achieve a cure in resins. Because of this essential role, styrene cannot be


Kelly DeBusk swaps information about OSHA concerns, ventilation and other issues with members Darren Suggs and Parker Suggs (his nephew) of Marble Masters, at this year's POLYCON 2021.

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resin % required in matrix* | 23 - 24 | 27 - 28 | 32 - 33 | 42 - 43 | 45 - 46 | 47 - 48 |
| Loose bulk density (lbs./cu.ft.) | 65 | 58 | 46 | 29 | 29 | 28 |
| Specific gravity | 2.3 | 1.8 | 1.5 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Free moisture content | < 0.4% | < 0.4% | < 0.4% | < 0.4% | < 0.4% | < 0.4% |

*Resin % recommendations are based on an 800-1000 cps casting resin at 70° F.

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Proper ventilation and personal protective equipment were put to use at this POLYCON demonstration at Sand & Swirl's plant.

eliminated from the formula and no acceptable replacement has been found to date.

The third option in the OSHA hierarchy is engineering controls. This can include modified equipment such as shifting from atomized spray machinery to non-atomized spray apparatus and ventilation controls. The ventilation controls must be evaluated before the final two options in the hierarchy can be used.

Those final two are: 1) if ventilation is not fully effective in controlling the styrene risk, will administrative controls do the trick? (In other words, can the work process procedure be modified to minimize styrene exposures? One tool might be controlled-spray techniques). 2) Can personal protective equipment (PPE), including respirators, be used? This last option can be costly to maintain because everyone required to wear a respirator must be medically evaluated annually, must have respirator training, must properly clean and store respirators so they know which respirator belongs to them, must undergo a respirator fit test, and must be clean shaven anytime the respirator is required to be used. Doing this for one or two employees isn't that big a deal, but if a company had to do this for all employees, then it would become burdensome.

This brings us back to ventilation issues.

What's needed for designing a ventilation system is an exhaust system and a fresh air intake. Keeping that in mind, anyone can remove a huge amount of air and remove a pollutant. But doing this becomes expensive because of the sizable equipment costs and replacement air costs. Big fans and big motors cost money. (In 2016 this figure was one dollar per cubic foot per meter per year).

The challenge then is removing the smallest amount of air with the greatest concentration of styrene. In smaller facilities, using one exhaust point and one air intake could get the job done efficiently, but in most facilities, the best way to remove the smallest amount of air with the greatest concentration of styrene is using hoods for source capture. Smaller ventilation in multiple plant areas is more cost-effective for removing greater concentrations of styrene, a factor important not only for designing a new system but for re-designing an existing ventilation system. Ventilation can be added in some cases rather than investing in an entirely new system.

## Analyzing source capture

To create effective source capture analysis, all areas of styrene emissions in a facility must be determined. These emissions occur during gel coat spray, mixing, casting operations and during the cure stage. Most companies are already spraying gel coat inside a spray booth, and ventilation is already installed for that booth. But this one source of ventilation cannot be relied upon to remove styrene from other processes in the facility unless that facility is small. With this in mind, companies should determine what areas in the facility should be set up to source capture. They should draw a plant diagram depicting each piece of equipment and each process area that emits styrene.

They should also create a process flow diagram with approximate application times and curing times for each process because both the applying and curing stages emit styrene. (Companies that have an air permit likely already have this information.) This data will be important when working with a ventilation design team.

For facilities that already have ventilation, it is important to know current specifications such as fan diameters, volumetric flow in actual cubic feet per minute and velocity. (This information is also required for air permit applications and should be kept handy when considering ventilation.) Since styrene exhaust is watched by both OSHA and EPA, companies considering new or renovated ventilation should contact the local air permit agency to determine if air modeling will be required and if a permit modification may be necessary. Knowing the EPA requirements of stacks also is vital to designing any ventilation system.

## Time to design or improve

After all the information mentioned above is gathered, it is time to contact a ventilation design team. Unfortunately, ventilation design is not an exact science, but the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) recommends systems be designed at assumed velocities

first. For vapors and gases, that velocity starts at 1,000 to 2,000 feet per minute. The velocity at the farthest source in the plant should be at this assumed velocity of 1,000 to 2,000 feet per minute. This means that fewer source capture points in a system will require more velocity.

**"If there is an existing ventilation system, then the design team will likely start with the specifications of the current system to design the new parts..."**

If there is an existing ventilation system, then the design team will likely start with the specifications of the current system to design the new parts of the system. From the starting point of either the ACGIH recommendation or current ventilation design specs, the design process is somewhat trial and error. Knowing what the EPA requires for exhaust of styrene in the area the facility is located will be crucial and knowing where hoods or additional exhaust fans can be installed that won't disrupt production is imperative. Providing good, accurate gathered information to the design team will result in the best possible design options at a facility. Several industrial ventilation apps can be downloaded to check design calculations and costs to ensure the most cost-effective option is selected.

## What to expect

Many companies wonder how effective a sufficient ventilation system can be. As an example, Composites Compliance conducted testing at a marble facility in August 2021 on a ventilation system that removed 50% of the styrene present in the facility. This was a small facility with one exhaust and one intake. If source capture was implemented, that efficiency could be improved.

After a ventilation system has been installed, styrene monitoring will need to be conducted at least annually. If a styrene monitoring check indicates the system isn't running as efficiently as the design specifies, there are a few troubleshooting options to try before calling in a professional. First, the filters should be checked to see if they have been maintained and changed on schedule. Not replacing the filter can lead to less-effective ventilation. Most air permits require periodic replacement of filters as well.

If the filters have been replaced and the problem persists, the next step is to check areas of the ventilation that employees can access easily (hood areas, open ducts, etc.). Check these areas to see if trash or personal belongings have been stuffed into the areas. Also, check to make sure personal belongings aren't hanging from any of the open areas. Any obstruction can reduce the effectiveness of ventilation. If no obstructions are present, then consider investing in a pitot tube to test the velocity across several points of the system to see if the problem area can be located. (Even if the problem cannot be fixed in house, identifying the specific areas where problems are means the entire system would not need to be disassembled to fix the problem.)

If a problem area is located, a visual check should be conducted to see if there is any sagging in the ductwork. Such sagging will decrease velocity, therefore decreasing ventilation efficiency. If no sagging is present, there may be residue buildup or even a dust buildup that needs to be cleaned.

As processes at a facility are changed or added, the impact on the ventilation in a plant should be considered. By knowing the basics of ventilation, companies should have enough general knowledge to be able to effectively determine if additional ventilation is needed or the current system just needs troubleshooting. ■

ICPA Board Member **KELLY DEBUSK** is the owner of Composites Compliance (www.compositescompliance.com.) She can be reached at k_debusk@compositescompliance.com.


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# POLYCON 2021 Salt Lake City

## Seeing old friends and making new ones

**BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE**

A common comment among members at the annual meetings of associations is "it's nice to see you again." However, there has never been a year when that saying didn't have a deeper meaning.

After more than 18 months of dealing with an international pandemic that caused ICPA to postpone, then cancel the 2020 POLYCON, the event for 2021 went forward with about 140 registrants gathered in Salt Lake City, UT.

"Over the years, getting together face to face has been a highlight for people because there is no better way to exchange information quickly and learn new ways of conducting our business," said ICPA President ReBecca Erdmann, co-owner of Sand & Swirl. Her company, which is in Ogden, UT, co-hosted the event with Tyvarian, Lindon, UT.

Hosts ReBecca and Corey Erdmann, Sand & Swirl, stand outside their plant welcoming visitors and POLYCON attendees.

"Even more importantly, however, is that we saw friends and professional contacts we hadn't seen in a long time and were able to make new connections for moving forward," she added.

### Learning better ways

The learning that Erdmann refers to took place in several forms at POLYCON 2021. During a one-day educational event at the hotel, attendees heard several general speakers (see sidebar on Westmoreland's keynote), then broke up into individual roundtables and smaller workshops to address specific topics. On the first and last day of the event, attendees drove to the Sand & Swirl and Tyvarian plants to see technical demonstrations on ways to perfect making products and listened to sessions on running a business.

One of the heavily attended events this year addressed the next generation of leaders in the industry. Part of the reason the session was popular is that there are so many family businesses in the industry. Each of the leaders came into the business in a different way and has faced different challenges.

The session was moderated by two examples: Luke Haas, a second-generation leader of Elite Marble, and Derek Hill, a third-generation leader with Syn-Mar Products.

Haas took over in the mid-2000s during one of the most tumultuous times for any business based on construction. Despite the fact he'd worked during his high school days in the plant, he swore during college days that he was not going into the same business as his parents. When he finally realized he wanted to run a business and that his parents' business offered that opportunity, his father and mother made it clear that they would be exiting at the same time he was entering.

By contrast, Hill knew from early on that he wanted to run the company. His grandfather founded the business and his father is still involved. Derek Hill was involved in the family business from the time he was a pre-teen through high school, working in different parts of the plant. When he went away to college, he sought a degree that would do him the most good at Syn-Mar (sales at the time and later on, management).

Luke Haas, owner of Elite Marble, moderated a panel on the next generation of leaders with Derek Hill, Syn-Mar. Haas was also the recipient of a president's award this year given by this year's leader ReBecca Erdmann.

A few of the key points that came out of that session included:

*Sometimes it's better to not re-invent every wheel.* Haas explained that: "You have a hunger to change things and that can be very good. But you have to learn to rely on those with experience while making what you learn your own."

*Communication is key.* One of the bigger problems with taking over a family business is that those coming into leadership roles don't communicate the changes coming and why they are coming. "But if you can't get your employees on board, you definitely face a struggle ahead of you," Hill said.

*Use that good communication to battle predisposed feelings.* Haas said that he realized early on that he needed to communicate better. As a result of that realization and his studies in business principles, his employees quickly learned his work ethic and why he wanted to do what he planned. However, "I had more resentment from outside vendors. Here I was a 24-year-old kid writing checks to them. You have to remember that they don't already have a history with you like your fellow co-workers."

*Speak with actions as much as words.* Hill commented that "I try not to lead with my last name in anything. I have had to build a reputation for myself based on what I did, not who I am."

*Build your team and bolster it.* When Haas started in the business, he was suddenly out on his own. One of the key steps he took early on was to create his teams and give them what opportunity he could to keep them happy.

"We meet everyday as a company at Elite and once a month for family. That gives us the benefit of putting our different generations and different experience levels together to learn from each other and help them feel the connection. Right now, we're working on finding new ways to align the company business with family life," Haas said.

*Learn to appreciate the younger generations.* "A lot of people have a negative view of the younger workforce," Hill said. "But the reality is that the workforce has changed, and we need to be aware of those generational differences such as the younger generation's desire for recognition for what they do. There is not a right or wrong way of doing this."

A familiar face at many POLYCONs is Dick Higgins, who retired recently after a 60-year career in the industry. He received the Royce E. Newsom award for 2021.

Other roundtable and breakout sessions addressed specific target markets for cast polymer products. Kirk Williamson, owner of Whitewater/Tyvarian, told a group of attendees how his company targets the lucrative area of appealing to new builders. Williamson used a fishing analogy to make his point about what it takes. For example:

"The first thing you need to know in fishing is where the fish are biting," he said. "When I was young, I spent a lot of time with new poles and equipment. But it didn't matter how good my gear was if there were no fish."

Williamson outlined a three-step process he adheres to with his sales force, which includes:

1) *Finding out where the fish are.* Because new building is often a regional market, "you have to get into their [potential clients'] heads" to find out what they are doing. That requires paying attention to who the local builders are and what they are building and what they already are putting into their homes. "With new construction, you got to have the right product," Williamson explained. "You also have to hit the right price range—the bigger the builder, the more discount you may need to give them to get them to bite." You also have to have the right terms, as well as the right staff to back up promises, Williamson explained. Whitewater's secret fishing hole includes Construction Monitor, a service that tracks and gives out information on building permits and sales data.

2) *Recognizing what gets the fish to bite.* To appeal to builders, you have to identify what's trending in kitchen and bath preferences for new homes. That requires not just following national trends through websites or national shows, but also tracking regional tastes as well through outlets such as local home shows.

3) *Keeping them hooked.* To be successful in the field of new construction requires keeping builders once you have them, Williamson explained. That means analyzing your organization to make sure you can continue to deliver, ensuring your salespeople have the tools they need and that the company has the right mix. The secret fishing hole for Williamson's company is usually surrounded by a mix of one salesperson to two installers and three production people.

## Appealing through a showroom

One of the most enjoyable aspects of having two facilities to visit this year was that both Tyvarian/Whitewater and Sand & Swirl have impressive showrooms used heavily by the

Kirk Williamson (right) and ICPA board member Doug Tibbetts (left) accepted an appreciation award on behalf of Tyvarian International, one of POLYCON's co-host companies. Williamson was also a featured speaker.

Larry Branan (right), R.J. Marshall, received congratulations from Todd Werstler, Tower Industries, for receiving the Royce E. Newsom award for 2020. Branon was critical in putting together the new PolyTECH demo days.

companies to appeal to customers or show prospects the different ranges of product available today.

ReBecca Erdmann explained in one special session how Sand & Swirl came to rely on principles from The Sandler Training system (www.sandler.com) for training employees who work the showroom.

Thirteen years ago, Erdmann was the only person in the original office and showroom who was solely devoted to the effort of showroom sales and customer service. Her husband and co-owner Corey Erdmann was the technical guru and outside salesperson with many years of experience in the industry. She had a management background but potential sales were also coming in through her. ReBecca explained that she was bidding on the same job for several different remodeling companies then wondering why the more expensive remodeling company kept winning the bids. "This is when we learned that this remodeling company had been attending Sandler Sales Training," she said.

The company built a new showroom/manufacturing plant in 2018 and today, that showroom's staff and other sales staff are people that have been given specific training on the Sandler method of qualifying prospects and solving their pain.

"My favorite thing about this process is that it's psychology-based," Erdmann explained. "You learn the different personality styles of certain customers then when they visit your showroom, you learn to identify what they really want and react to them using a personality style that will appeal to them. That's how you can sell them based on value instead of price," she said.

She illustrated what she meant by explaining an early sales effort by her in which she was touting the wonderful features and benefits of an integrated sink. "The guy had already told me once he wasn't shopping for a vanity top, but I went into my sales pitch anyway and I lost him," she says.

With the Sandler method, "You learn to listen 70% of the time and only talk 30%. The goal is to ask appropriate questions and find out what their real problems and priorities are. The more you listen, the more comfortable they become with you and with sharing their pain," she said.

It works wonderfully in showrooms, she said, because once you see what is important to them, you can show them what cultured marble is and explain what their options are, including different price ranges and options based on their situation and needs. The wide range of samples shown and the scenarios of the showroom are much better tools than small samples taken to a potential candidate's site. Today, Sand & Swirl's showroom acts as a pre-qualifying tool—Corey doesn't usually go out to jobs to measure for an estimate until people have already visited the showroom.

## A night of honors

Besides the learning opportunity POLYCON presented, the event also gave the industry a chance to network, socialize and take note of the accomplishments within the industry. This year the association gave out two years' worth of awards. Among those who received recognition during the annual 2021 gala were:

The association's top honor, the Royce Newsom Pioneer awards, went to Larry Branan, the R.J. Marshall Company (2020), and Richard Higgins, who retired after a long career with HK Research (2021). Branan is well known as the organizer of ICPA's technical sessions at POLYCON and was given a separate appreciation award for the most recent

show. Higgins is one of the true pioneers of the cast polymer industry with 60 years in the business rising through the ranks from lab work to running HK Research. In more recent times, he's become a main source of expertise as well as a voice for the industry. Todd Werstler, a long-time friend of Royce Newsom, presented the awards.

Also given out were President's awards, which ICPA head leaders give for outstanding association efforts. Luke Haas, president in 2019, presented his award to Kelly DeBusk, who owns Composites Compliance (see article in this issue on Ventilation Basics on page 8), helped develop ICPA's SAFE PLANT program and became a board member this year. This year's president ReBecca Erdmann presented her award to Luke Haas not only for his service as president but for stepping in to fill another person's shoes who had to leave the position as well as for many years of voluntary efforts.

Many of the sessions this year were packed.

## Membership report

At the opening session this year, a delighted Beth Kubinec, ICPA's new membership coordinator, was able to report that ICPA had reached 92 members by the event. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, more than 20 companies joined in 2020 and 2021.

"The goal is to break 100 by the end of the 2021-22 membership year," Kubinec told the audience. The key will be getting current members involved in giving the association potential names for membership and support in contacting them.

"Most of the new members came from referrals so if you think of a company that would benefit or one that would benefit us as an association, please follow up. Let's grow the ICPA together," Kubinec said. ■

**GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE** is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She welcomes story ideas from readers. Send them to gsparente@verizon.net.

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## POLYCON KEYNOTE SPEAKER

# Learning to recognize and grab what challenges bring


Doug Westmoreland, Mincey Marble, inspired the POLYCON audience by telling about the bumps and highlights of a long career.

One of the main take-aways from keynote speaker Doug Westmoreland's remarks was that opportunity sometimes comes along when it's least expected and the key to success is to be prepared when it arrives.

Westmoreland, who is currently chief operating officer of the giant Mincey Marble Manufacturing, Inc., Gainesville, GA, speaks from experience. Westmoreland's more than three-decades-long career has spanned the gamut of the industrial world from hands-on work to sales to management to owning several of his own companies, and his involvement in the world of marble goes back to the early days of the industry. The first job came soon after college (the mid-1980s) when he was hired to manage a location for an Asheville, NC company (NOVA Kitchen & Bath).

"I knew nothing about the industry, but had a business degree, was interviewed and got hired," he said. The location he managed had a showroom that was focused on selling and showcasing the product. While working at NOVA, he recognized a need in the industry—good, reliable installers of the product, a need he said is still prevalent today. Westmoreland was young and ambitious and wanted to be his own boss, so after a year, he went out on his own as an installer with NOVA as one of his main clients.

"What I offered as an installer is something that continues to be crucial today. I did what I promised. If you say you're going to show up at 8 o'clock on Friday, you need to be there not only on Friday, but at 8," he explained. That attitude won him the reputation of preferred installer and his business took off quickly. After several years, he'd saved enough money to move on to his next dream: his own company and showroom. He opened Westmoreland Kitchen & Bath—picked up several cabinet lines, became a NOVA marble dealer and a certified solid surface fabricator. The business grew rapidly by sticking to Westmoreland's rule of fulfilling promises made to customers.

Several years later, opportunity came knocking again in the form of Kenneth Mincey, founder of Mincey Marble Manufacturing, who approached Westmoreland about selling the Mincey product in Westmoreland's company. Mincey "mesmerized" Westmoreland with his approach to business and industry.

"I knew almost immediately that this man and his approach was somebody I wanted to hitch my wagon to," he said. For example, Mincey Marble had a 75-page color brochure of available products including 28 tub styles alone, something not seen in those days.

After a week of thinking about Kenneth Mincey's offer, Westmoreland made a trip down to Georgia where Mincey was located, and this time, "I did most of the talking," he says. He convinced Mincey not just to offer the product through the showroom, but to let him go on the road selling the Mincey brand in the Carolinas.

He was also still trying to run his own business, a pressure he eventually decided to ease. He sold his business and went to work full time at Mincey in 1988.

After several years on the road, Westmoreland decided it was time to pursue another dream of his: to make his own product. He shared with Kenneth Mincey what he wanted to do.

"Kenneth was a true visionary. He not only had his own goals, he understood that everyone must have dreams," Westmoreland said. He not only gave his blessing, he told Westmoreland he would remain on the Mincey payroll, "up to the day I turned the key on my new plant."

Westmoreland visited with many ICPA members after his keynote. Pictured here is Westmoreland (left) swapping stories will Kirk Williamson, owner of Tyvarian.

On Labor Day 1995, Westmoreland took a "large leap of faith" and turned that key on Premier Marble. He had no employees, no customers in place and no manufacturing experience.

"Thinking back on those times, I realize I wasn't even smart enough to be scared. I had a plan A but no plan B because I believed if you're looking at a plan B, you're already expecting A to fail," Westmoreland joked.

But he built the new company on the principles he used for his installation practice: to deliver on promises and to meet a need. The company put some new practices into place including:

- A plant that was completely air-conditioned. ("I gained more in employee efficiency than we lost in electricity," he said).
- An emphasis on cleanliness and organization. ("I have always associated cleanliness with quality.")
- A demand for consistency. ("I remember visiting plants where they were making marble in the same way my grandma made cornbread. A little of this, a little of that. That doesn't create a recipe for consistency.")
- Becoming adamant that when a problem crept up, the solution should be to change one thing at a time. ("We documented any issues we had, what worked, what didn't. We documented the time of day, the temperature inside and out, the weather. It became our manual.")

The next big challenge for Westmoreland came with the crash of 2008 when business dried up at the same time he was trying to put two college-aged girls through school.

"For those of you that went through this era, you know what a dark time it was. The market crashed, the housing market was nonexistent, jobs were few and far between and many of my contractors had given up or the bank had given up on them. I knew it would take a while to rebound from what happened so I kept my head down and thought maybe I should finally come up with a plan B," Westmoreland explained.

Plan B morphed into Mincey after Kenneth's daughter Donna, who was stepping into the leadership role, asked Westmoreland to return to the company. Westmoreland found jobs for every one of his employees at Premier and went back to Mincey where for the next 10 years, he served as vice president of business development, making it his mission to build the Mincey brand. In 2018, another manufacturing opportunity presented itself when the company decided to build a giant facility on an 80-acre site. The plant itself covered 8.8 acres with a 35,000-square-foot headquarter office. Westmoreland once again had the chance to oversee putting state-of-the-art ideas into effect including a complete RFID system for every mold in the shop, an automated gel coat spraying system, efficiency processes that eliminate "zigs and zags" of the manufacturing process and more.

In 2019, Donna Mincey asked Westmoreland to step into the role of chief operating officer.

The road has been long and winding and Westmoreland looked around the room at POLYCON and gave credit to some of the attendees there who have shared their expertise and advice. This sharing is a backbone of the industry, he said.

He also gave credit to hard work and listening to people you admire. For him, that includes current Clemson football coach Dabo Swinney, whose bits of wisdom Westmoreland has used in his public speaking.

One of the points Swinney stresses is to bloom where you're planted. "That's what I have tried to do all my life. You know where the grass is green? The grass is green where you water it," Westmoreland concluded. ■

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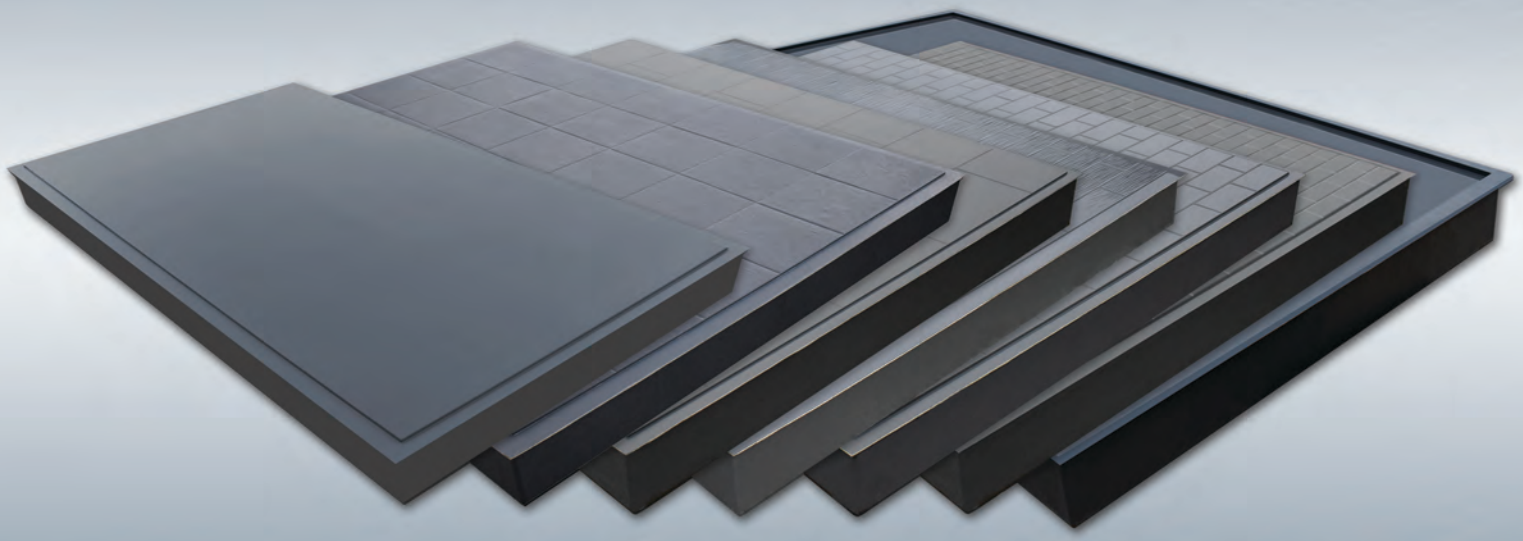

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# The future of styrene in the workplace

BY JOHN SCHWEITZER

**MANY COMPANIES THAT USE UNSATURATED POLYESTER RESIN TO MAKE PRODUCTS SUCH AS CAST POLYMER VANITIES AND BATHTUBS MAINTAIN AN 8-HOUR AVERAGE WORKPLACE EXPOSURE TO STYRENE OF 50 PARTS PER MILLION (PPM).** Most combine mechanical ventilation and respirators. (See Kelly DeBusk's article on ventilation basics, page 8). But what might the future of these control methods be?

## Background

The industry group Styrene Information and Research Center recommends limiting workplace exposure to 20 ppm to avoid ototoxicity (hearing loss) that theoretically can occur when styrene absorbed into the lungs travels through the bloodstream to the sensitive cells in the ear that translate pressure waves in the air into nervous system signals the brain interprets as sound. However, the data does not clearly show that the risk of hearing loss at 50 ppm is significantly greater than at 20 ppm.

Meanwhile, the official Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) permissible exposure limit (PEL) for styrene is 100 ppm. OSHA can enforce voluntary limits such as the 10 ppm the American Conference of Government Industrial Hygienists sets as the styrene threshold limit value (which also has been set to prevent ototoxicity). But this situation has occurred only in unusual circumstances. OSHA has no plans for rulemaking activity to update its styrene PEL.

However, amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) adopted by Congress in 2016 are likely to result in significant changes in the protections provided for workers. The revised TSCA requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set risk management standards that limit exposure to workers, plant communities and consumers to prevent the "unacceptable risk" of adverse impact on human health or damage to the environment resulting from exposure to styrene and other chemicals used in commerce. EPA's TSCA program could start work on styrene as early as 2022, and industry compliance with the resulting risk management standard could be required starting in 2032.

The industry can look to EPA's experience with chemicals in the TSCA rulemaking pipeline since 2016 to get a picture of the policies and practices the agency is likely to apply to its risk management rulemaking for styrene. Even though a weight-of-the-evidence assessment does not support a cancer concern for styrene, many believe the agency will conduct a cancer risk assessment for styrene and set risk management standards to protect workers and others exposed to the substance from what the agency considers to be an unacceptable risk of cancer.

What should we expect from an EPA cancer risk assessment for styrene? When estimating the exposure level likely to cause an unacceptable cancer risk, EPA prefers to use a method called "linear extrapolation." Previous styrene cancer risk assessments based on data from studies on laboratory mice and using linear extrapolation (by

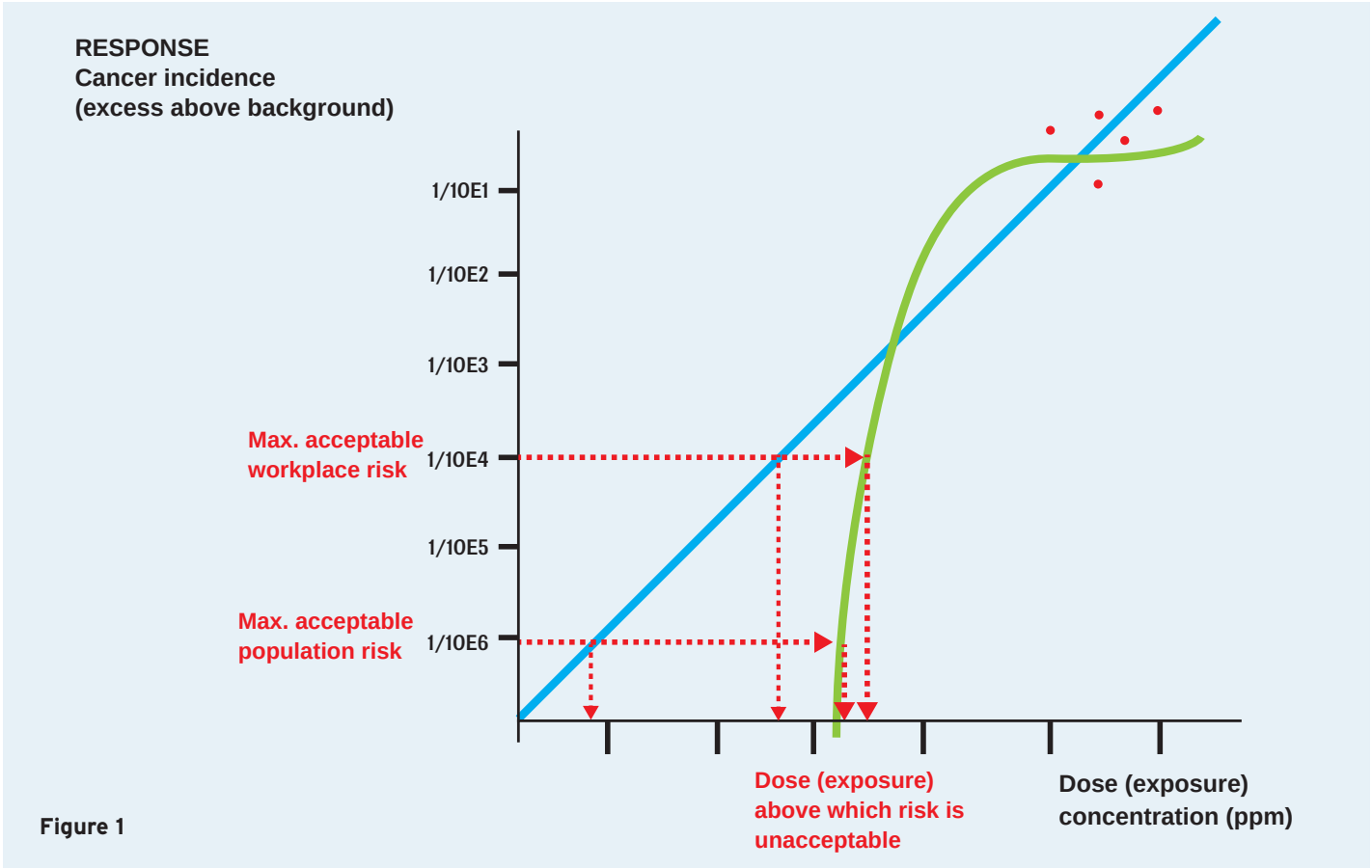


**Figure 1**

agencies such as California EPA) have concluded that even extremely low workplace exposure to styrene could result in unacceptable cancer risk.

An alternative method to linear extrapolation called "threshold mode of action" is, scientifically, a better fit to the mouse data, and the industry has initiated a cancer risk assessment for styrene using this threshold approach. The industry will press the agency and its external scientific review panel to consider the validity of this method of cancer risk assessment for styrene.

A threshold approach will provide higher estimates of the exposures associated with maximum acceptable risk than linear extrapolation. (See figure 1). But we should not expect EPA's target exposure limits to allow the industry to continue current practices. EPA will probably want the industry to adopt measures to reduce workplace styrene exposures below (and maybe significantly below) where they are now.

Congress did instruct EPA to consider feasibility when setting enforceable regulatory exposure limits. This feasibility consideration can include cost, administrative and operational burdens and impacts on employee turnover. Still, it is very important that EPA be convinced to adopt a threshold mode of action approach for estimating the styrene exposure levels associated with unacceptable cancer risk. Linear extrapolation is expected to yield exposure limits so low that consideration of feasibility will not result in regulatory limits that can be practically achieved.

## Final thought

Because compliance with a TSCA styrene risk management standard will not be required for 10 years or more, companies can take advantage of this time to find opportunities to reduce the number of workers exposed to styrene. For example, improving ventilation and reconfiguring operations to isolate emissive processes from other operations can reduce the number of workers for which additional controls may be required under the TSCA standard. ■

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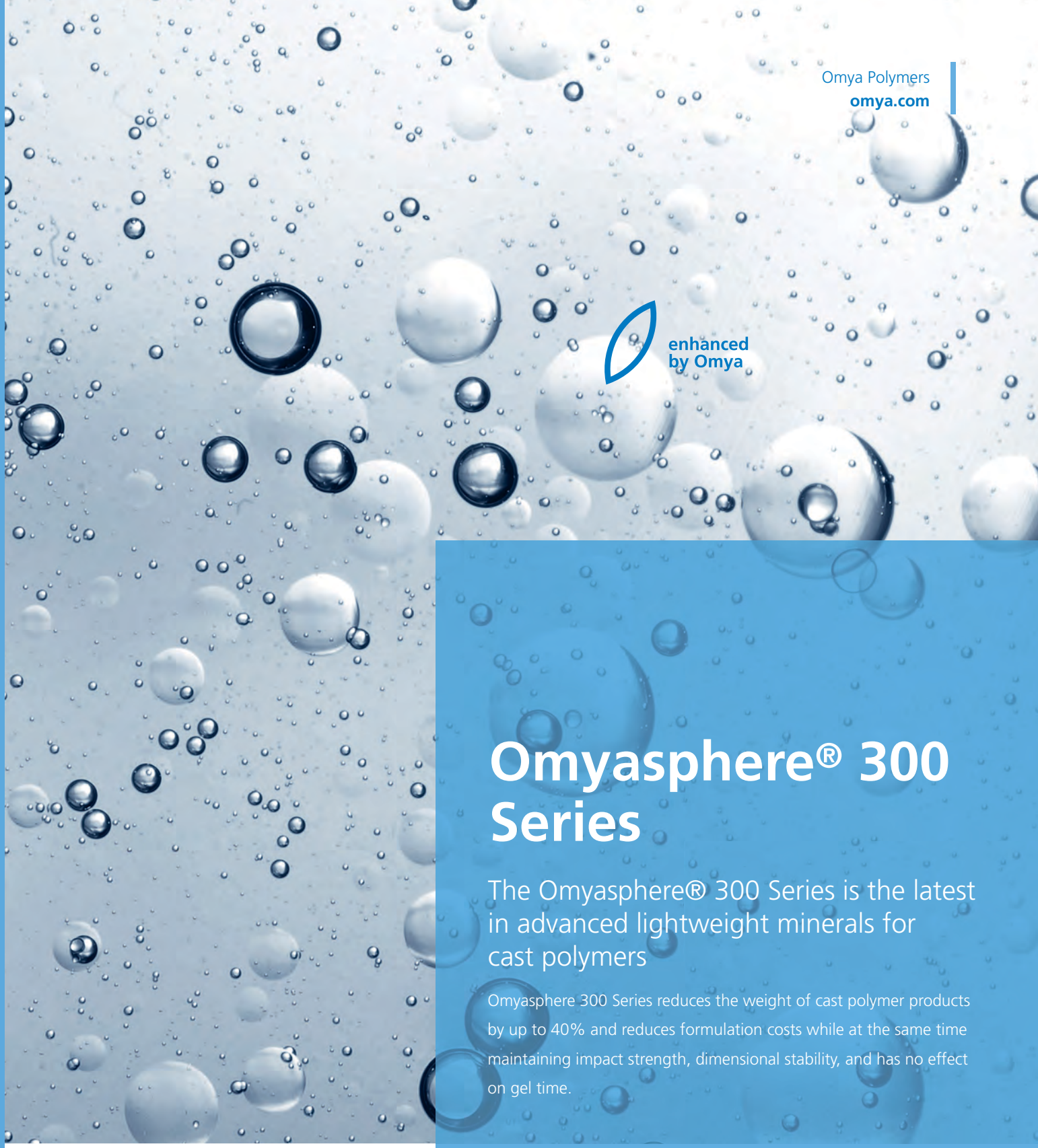

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THINKING OF TOMORROW

## Next year's POLYCON event

Planners have already begun working on next year's POLYCON, which will be held Sept. 19-21 in Canton, OH. Host manufacturer companies will be American Marble Industries in Canton, and Tower Industries in Massillon, OH. Mark your calendars now and stay tuned to ICPA communication channels for details. Event hotel location and travel information will be announced in early 2022. Registration begins in April.

One special event has already been confirmed: The cocktail reception and awards dinner, which is one of social highlights of POLYCON, will be held at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, followed by an exclusive tour of the museum for attendees.

## Did you miss a session at POLYCON 2021?

One of the benefits ICPA is offering members who attended POLYCON 2021 Salt Lake City, UT, is access to the PolyTech sessions and roundtable discussions filmed at the event so that those who were there could see what they may have missed because of scheduling conflicts. After the event, attendees received links to the videos, which were posted on YouTube.

Beginning in December, those videos will also be available to other members. The videos and other photographs will be available for viewing on the member login page of the ICPA website: TheICPA.com.

## A get together in the spring

ICPA will be hosting a networking event in early spring of 2022 in the Atlanta, GA area. The idea for a smaller, mid-year event has been discussed in the past and supported by ICPA members. Even more support has poured in because of the success of POLYCON 2021, Salt Lake City, UT.

Details of the new event will be released on the ICPA website, theICPA.com. The association and planners of the networking event are asking for volunteers to help with coordination and to sponsor the event. Contact Jennifer Towner, ICPA executive director, at jennifer@TheICPA.com to lend support.

## Live Grout Free website needs spotlighting

One of the topics at ICPA marketing committee meetings this year has been how to boost and improve one of the industry's main marketing channels, Live Grout Free. The website outlines the benefits of cast polymer products and showcases what can be done with cast polymer materials. At POLYCON 2021, ICPA outlined for attendees the campaign's marketing platform, and the association is now asking members to post the Live Grout Free logo on their company's website along with a link to that site. JPG and PNG formatted logos can be downloaded using the links on the ICPA website homepage. The Live Grout Free website is found at www.LiveGroutFree.com. The Live Grout Free brand also has a page on Instagram, @live_grout_free, and on Facebook, @livegroutfree—so be sure to like, follow, and share!

## Safe plant enrollment jumps at POLYCON

Attendees at POLYCON 2021 Salt Lake City, UT were encouraged to be part of the growing number of member companies participating in ICPA's SAFE PLANT program. The program, which was developed following guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Safe + Sound program, was reviewed at the POLYCON general session so attendees could hear how simple the signup process is and how the program benefits participants and the industry.

Attendees then had the opportunity to sign up for the program. As a result, seven more members committed to the program bringing the total participation to 30%. ICPA's goal is to increase the enrollment to 50% this membership year. All SAFE PLANT members and details on how to participate are listed on the ICPA website.

## A new way for industry women to connect

The POLYCON 2021 roundtable discussion was such a success that attendees wanted to maintain the momentum. Following the event, Kerry Klodt, Tower Industries, volunteered and then set up a Facebook page called ICPA Women in Manufacturing. The group hopes to use the site to network, exchange business ideas, get to know their peers and plan future get-togethers.

ICPA members interested in joining should go to this link: www.facebook.com/groups/316480606917548/

## Cast Polymer Radio going strong

Jonathan Taylor, host of Cast Polymer Radio, got a chance at this year's POLYCON 2021 Salt Lake City, UT to meet many of the people he's interviewed in the past few years as he built the podcast into its current success.

Taylor, who is a technical sales manager at Sanco, as well as the publisher and host of "Composites Weekly," started the ICPA-supported podcast in 2020 as a way to showcase business issues, current events and current challenges for the cast polymer industry, but the show has blossomed into a major communication channel for the association and industry. It has posted more than 110 episodes and had tens of thousands of unique downloads.

**"Podcasting has always been an attractive option to me for getting content out to our industry. Audiences can listen when they want and where they want. That compares with other content platforms where you can't achieve that same intimate one-on-one connection."**

Jonathan Taylor interviewed several attendees at this year's POLYCON

Taylor has featured many ICPA member companies, presenting to the world glimpses of the ICPA membership base and highlighting the viewpoints of some of the leaders.

Go to www.castpolymer.com for a complete list of episodes or visit the ICPA website at www.theICPA.com.

A sample of recent topics includes:

- How to attract Generation Z
- Effective business communications
- Protecting reputation in the social media world
- Tik-Tok marketing for business owners
- Following a dynamic sales recipe
- Building a world-class organization through core values
- Breakthrough innovations and what they can do

## Welcome new ICPA members:

- Forged by Creation in Tulsa, OK, https://forgedbycreation.com/
- Marblecraft in Bryan, TX, www.marblecraftbcs.com/
- Pro-Marble in Rupert ID, www.promarblellc.com/
- ChemTrend in Howell, MI, https://chemtrend.com/

OTHER NEWS OF NOTE

## Paying attention to Millennials is critical

Millennials are nearing a critical juncture of displacing baby boomers as this nation's dominant generation, so those who market real estate and construction-related products need to make sure marketing dollars are geared toward that audience, according to a recent article by Kleber & Association Market + Communications.

The 72 million people who make up the millennial generation are the most numerous and best-educated demographic group in U.S. history, the article says.

Recently, older millennials of child-bearing age have moved into real estate markets in a major way, "and their approach to home and building products purchasing makes them stand out from previous generations," the article says.

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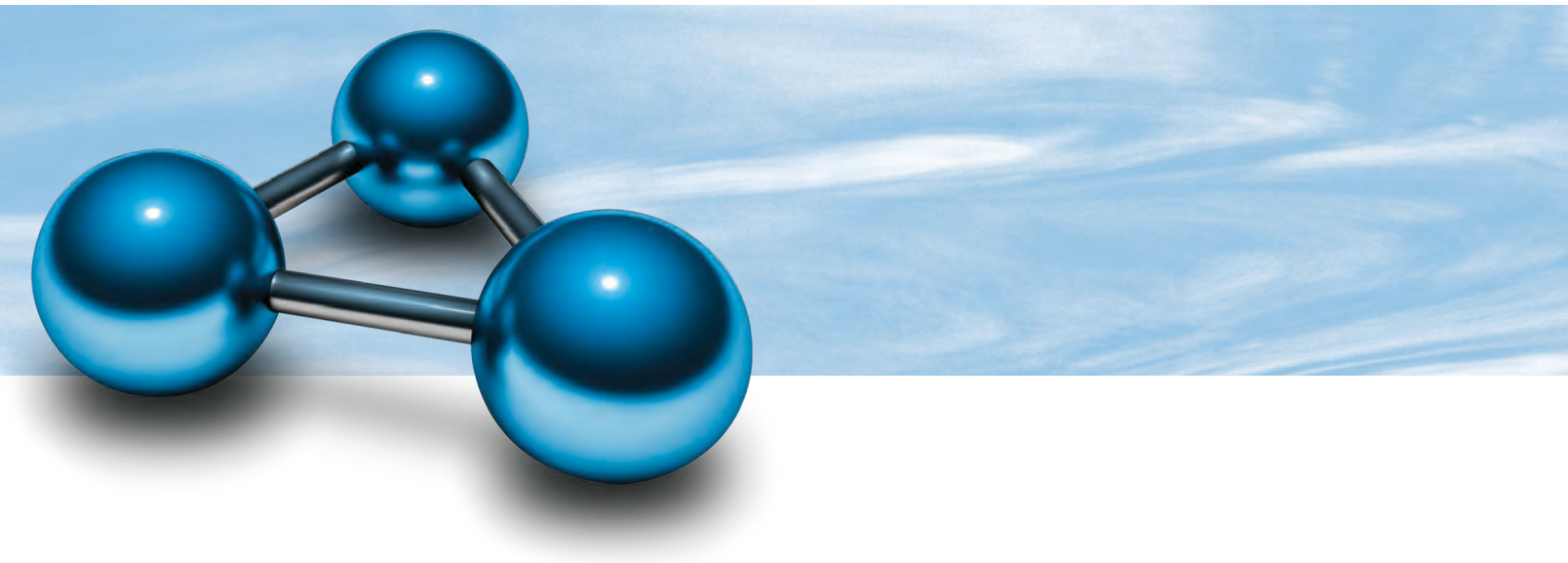

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