

Manufacturers Expand Offerings in Hydronics Market

Consumer interest grows as systems age



KEEPING UP: The world of hydronics underwent a serious shift 10 years ago, and contractors need to keep up with the latest offerings.

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The number of [hydronic](#) offerings on the market is growing as firms expand their product lines to meet changes in how consumers want to heat their homes.

All leading hydronics manufacturers are looking to find new ways to grow their business, said Mike DelConte, director of heating and liquid propane gas at F.W. Webb Co. These new offerings can be as simple as an increase in sizes on a particular accessory or boiler. In extreme cases, DelConte said, he sees companies looking to completely diversify their offering and jump into whole new product categories.

Much of the growth comes from the leading hydronics companies, DelConte said, such as Taco and Lochinvar. Taco, for example, has introduced higher performance circulator pumps with regard to curves, Bluetooth technology, and more ECM offerings. Lochinvar has introduced equipment with increased sizes, better touchscreen controls, and Wi-Fi connectivity capabilities. He also sees new and improved products from Caleffi, Bradford White, U.S. Boiler Company, NAVIEN, and Ideal Boilers.

“As a distributor, continuous innovation and product development is what we expect from our leading manufacturers, and it allows us to take great care of our customers,” DelConte said.

New Consumers Have Global Vision

HVAC manufacturing firms better known for other products are also adding to their hydronics line-up. One of those is Resideo.

Jason Abajian, lead sales representative for Resideo's North American water operations, said his company has always had a very robust business in the United States. It's even more robust in Europe, which Abajian attributes to the different ways infrastructure and the corresponding technology developed in those two regions. Now, younger buyers are taking a more global perspective as they seek comfort and energy efficiency for their homes.

“This new generation is reaching out and looking at different options,” Abajian said. “They're not just going to the same products as in the past.”

Many of the latest hydronic offerings from Resideo help contractors respond to this increased interest, he said. This includes products that make boilers easier to install, more pump options, and a new magnetic separator system to eliminate contaminants.

Combis Change the Game

One of the most popular items in the hydronics market today is high-efficiency boilers that provide hot water for both hydronic heating and direct use. These are better known as “combis.” Jeff Thompson, vice president of dealer products at APR Supply Co., said these units started gaining market share about 10 years ago, during that decade's big stimulus push, which included tax credits for improving home energy efficiency. This change has moved a lot of boiler work to HVAC contractors from plumbers.

That change also created a new demand for decontaminant products. Most of the high efficiency boilers and combis use an aluminum or stainless steel heat exchanger. These can be more vulnerable to harsh water conditions in the closed hydronic loop. Products like flush carts and inhibitor were almost nonexistent a decade ago. Magnetic filtration is also on the rise because it helps eliminate ferrous materials and magnetite in the system, further improving overall water quality. This helps both the heat exchanger and the system components — in particular, ECM pumps, DelConte said.

Thompson also sees a lot of growth in modified condensing gas units and the accessories that go with them. Most of this growth comes from retrofits in his region, Thompson said, which includes Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. It's less popular with builders.

“I don't see a ton of new construction with hydronics,” Thompson said.

DelConte agrees with that assessment and said this is a big change from the second half of the 20th century, when hydronics was the major heat source in new homes on the East Coast. Of course, that means plenty of existing homes that need upgrades and replacements.



NEED TO KNOW: F.W. Webb uses this truck to take hydronics training to contractors. New entrants in the market may offer lower prices but less training and support.

One warning DelConte offers is that some companies see an opportunity to make a quick dollar in hydronics; they may not make the products they sell or provide little support to contractors. The prices are lower from some of these companies, but there's a reason for that.

“We want vendors who are in this with us for the long haul as it relates to training, support, customer service, and more,” he said. “We also seek those that are continuously committed to new product development.”