



A New Course

NOTES FROM THE ROAD



Don't let anyone tell you Leprechauns don't exist! I found him hiding under that rotomolded bin in Dublin.

Stay out of court. No-one enjoys it except the lawyers. My latest long-term project has just ended and with it an intense period of analysis and evidence giving. It has been fascinating to watch a large-scale trial constructed and then presented by both sides; it has equally been fascinating to watch how people react under pressure and how things can be interpreted very differently by each side. I've now been involved in a number of such cases, most of which never make it to court, but all of which could have been avoided with some logical steps at the outset.

Many molders around the world make standard parts which are rarely exposed to high performance requirements. Those that do make products for demanding applications will often realise that they need to mold to a higher standard. However,

it is often equally surprising to see that many molders make assumptions about their parts and processes that prove to be incorrect when something such as material or machinery changes. Remember that even a humble water tank should be designed and molded properly.

As a result, I think there is a case to be made for a new seminar based on 'How to Reduce Exposure to Legal Action in Rotomolding'. Some of the areas it would include are:

- **Understanding product performance requirements** – do you really understand what the part will be used for and what it will be exposed to during its lifetime?
- **Establishing a contract with customers / end-users** – who does what, when and where?
- **Good design practice** – follow the golden rules for

rotomolding and eliminate a lot of grief.

- **Design and part testing for effectiveness** - test the design (and change it if necessary) and then test the part to see that it matches.
- **Validation of production vs. design** - make sure that you actually produce what you say you are producing.
- **Understanding materials and long-term performance** - how many molders really understand material properties vs. processing?
- **Good process control** - duh.
- **Documentation of production processes** - good records which are used to maintain good production standards are a perfect antidote to law-suits.
- **In-process QC to identify problems early** - don't allow faulty products to reach customers.
- **Testing of materials and parts** - establish appropriate test methods for the product and its environment.
- **Quick feedback mechanisms from customers to shop-floor staff** - when things do go wrong, how to make sure the information reaches the right people?

There are more but these would be good starters for everyone to understand in the context of how to make sure that your products are (1) the highest quality you can achieve and (2) that they meet the expectations of the final end-user.

With a properly developed and documented plan, many issues that end in dispute would be identified before they happen or would be resolved through good record keeping. There is nothing worse than hearing that no measurements were made, no testing carried out, no records kept, broad assumptions made or 'we've been doing it that way for years and never had a problem'. If there is anything that I have learned as a result, it is that becoming comfortable with your processes without properly understanding them is dangerous.

I don't often ask for feedback in this column but I would be interested to know if people think this might be an interesting course - I feel a world tour across six continents coming up later this year...!

Summer Break

So it's time for a break before delving back into all those projects on hold. Despite the backdrop of economic stress around the world, there are actually a lot of things happening (all over the world). I need a few weeks rest (for the old noggin) and then I'll be back on the road. And while I think about it, short term project work is good but I think I enjoy longer-term more so I'm considering working for a small select group of molders on a contingency basis based on their resulting performance - anywhere in the world. Will follow up with more next time...

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