

New Zealand Insulators 2021 (the year in review)

JANUARY

Our Temuka factory returned to normal full production, as per usual we had a few staff starting a few days prior, making sure the factory was prepared for the start-up. Unfortunately, some unseasonal rain had flooded our factory creating a little havoc prior to everyone starting on the 11th.

Our Bipel (KO7 fuse carrier press) received a birthday, ready for a busy year ahead and we start the design/build process for a new large horizontal reamer for porcelain insulators.

Our factory air compressor (it's a biggie) starts to struggle in the South Canterbury summer heat, might be time to retire the old girl...

FEBRUARY

We finalised our 2-day ISO external audit, completed by Telarc. A pleasing result confirming that at NZI we live and breathe our Quality Assurance procedures and process. We also enjoyed a visit from NZ Customs reviewing our border protection and customs import/export process, and of course we received another clean bill of health.

Our CPS (Cyclone processed slip) vibrator/screens decided to self-destruct causing a little commotion for the local residents (our neighbours) as it banged and clanged itself to death although quickly remedied by our onsite engineering team having it up and running again quick smart.

Just when we were all starting to enjoy life at COVID level 1, Auckland quickly move to level 3 and everyone else sits in level 2 (if we only knew what was coming later in the year).

MARCH

Our owners/Directors visit the Temuka factory to meet the team and spend a day reviewing plant and equipment improvements, discuss opportunities and work with the management team – as always great to have them onsite. We note the 12-month anniversary of COVID arriving on NZ shores (not a real celebration).

And we start the transition to our new payroll system (MYOB IMS) unfortunately there was no mention of pay rises!!!! as a result of that change over.

APRIL

We say goodbye to daylight saving for another year although Easter Bunny does the rounds in the factory and chocolate and hot cross buns keep us all well and truly sustained.

Freight and shipping continue to create issues for us and juggling our imports and exports becomes a major

by-product of COVID-19 and a gift that will keep giving for months and months.

Our new air compressor arrives from Belgium hopefully to provide another 25+ years of reliable service (like the old one did).

Electricity prices start to sky rocket which is just in time for us to renegotiate a new 5-year supply agreement.

We all start making selections for our annual free issue of NZI winter clothing, made available to all staff (got to love those possum merino socks and the ice breaker tops on a cold South Canterbury Day).

MAY

Some new faces start showing up on site as our staff recruitment program continues with many new recruits into our business. Our Employee Assistance Program gets a name change but we continue to offer and utilise this great service for all our staff. Our A&G Price clay extruder gets a timely rebuild and birthday ready to keep it fully operational, our extruders do an amazing amount of work so regular proactive maintenance helps keep up the trouble-free operation.

We have a visit from Electricity Distribution Industry leaders and engineers and key customers keen to understand the finer details of NZI manufacturing techniques, they leave after a day visit with a much better understanding of NZI, and that when we say quality, we really mean it and can prove it.

It must be winter in South Canterbury as a cold snap swoops in and freezes many water pipes across the site.

JUNE

We get our roof cleaned (no small feat when it's the size of 3 x football fields), but now ready for a trouble-free winter (if we get any rain). We start a lighting project across the factory replacing all lights to LED and energy efficient systems, the improvement in lighting levels is amazing. And to continue the energy reduction theme we install power logging equipment across our factory to better manage our energy usage and provide valuable data to make the best use of our TOU energy rates.

All staff line up for our free hearing, lung function and general health check-ups. We all get busy in our day to day lives so NZI likes making sure that at least once a year all staff get a free check-up just to make sure we are all in good health.

JULY

We continue our focus on training and refreshers for all staff utilising our inhouse SOP's and "Safetyhub" individual training programs. We also changed it up a little and have some training workshops with local

physios on our site, specifically to help us avoid any aches and pains.

The annual EEA conference in Wellington finally gets to happen after COVID-19 did its best to cancel the event. Our new revised exhibit stand was well accepted by those attending and our shared site with Eaton made a pleasant change providing a great opportunity for our customers to better understand the NZI/Eaton business relationship which is as strong today as it was when we joined forces decades ago.

AUGUST

Some serious rebuilding and maintenance/renewals were completed to some of our 8 kilns (each the size of a shipping container). We also schedule upgrades for computer/PLC systems for later in the year as we change to a "virtual" control system for the 8 kilns.

Everyone gets to enjoy a sunny day as we practice the Fire Evacuation and Earthquake safety drills, hopefully never to be used for real.

We start planning our annual NZI Christmas function (where has the year gone).

Oh No!!!! COVID reappears (not that it went away) but now presented as the Delta strain, unfortunately throwing NZ back into lockdowns. This was extremely well managed by the NZI team and we continued full operation for our essential service customers. (Unfortunately, the lockdowns continued longer than we all ever anticipated).

SEPTEMBER

We focus on testing and trials to improve the Rheology (fluidity/viscosity) of our clay body/slip and filter pressing process of our porcelain insulator body, all in the endeavour to improve the NZI product – everything is always part of our continuous improvement process.

A new phone system and associated hardware gets installed in our Temuka HO all supported by the installation of a fibre communication network (which took a while to arrive in South Canterbury).

Our EAP (Employee Assistance Program) returns to a new COVID-19 normal with onsite social distancing and face to face meetings as required.

OCTOBER

A visit from one of our directors (as COVID has the other directors and management locked up in Auckland).

It's always nice to be able to "show off" our improvements and changes made since previous visits.

We start another recruitment campaign to support business growth although completing this in the middle of lockdown makes things a little more difficult.

We finally receive some long-awaited shipments of raw materials out of the UK with lead times blowing out from 2 months to 9+ months, always providing a challenge for our forecasting.

A long Labour Day weekend provided us all with a little extra R&R to help us all in the lead up to year end.

NOVEMBER

We purchase some "new to NZI" plant & equipment to help bolster our factory output – hydraulic pump, ball mill and media, vibrating sieve, viscometer and homogeniser – all a welcome addition to existing P&E and will help improve our output.

We start ramping up production as much as we can (with many of our staff committing to hours and hours of overtime work).

Our Christmas function is a roaring success with some great "Bethel & Ethel, Bingo Girls" entertainment and we also raised a healthy sum of cash to be distributed to local charity.

DECEMBER

We shuffle a few last-minute changes to our revised 2022 NZI product catalogue (these will be out any day soon). We make last minute changes to our Christmas maintenance shutdown schedules and we finalise some urgent customer orders as we clean up and shutdown the factory ready for a welcome break.

We lock in the January 10th start-up procedures and confirm our production schedules for Jan/Feb/March/April 2022.

But maybe at last, there's a little slow down and a chance to look back on the year past and our many successes achieved.

Over the year we celebrated these staff milestones, all celebrating their place in the NZI 25 years plus club:
Rayleine P – 42 years, Warren C – 41 years, Heather G – 34 years, Debbie C – 31 years, Peter C – 30 years, Ian C – 30 years, Gary A – 30 years, Peter Q – 29 years, Debbie S – 27 years, David H – 25 years.

We also celebrated Margaret D – 20 years and Isaac G, Kyle W, Louise E, Mandy G and Tim L who all reached their 10-year NZI Anniversary

What a great effort of 389 years of combined experience and NZI knowledge. It's been another successful year for NZI - well done team.

To our customers, suppliers and supporters of our business – Thank you all for the continued support during 2021 and we all hope 2022 is another year to remember for all the right reasons.

Chris van der Werff | General Manager