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Del Monte charges ahead

A conversion to fast charging for its lift truck batteries keeps its fleet on the move.

AS ONE OF AMERICA'S LEADING FOOD PROVIDERS, DEL MONTE Foods must have an efficient supply chain to nourish the nation's food chain.

Its distribution center in Lathrop, Calif., one of 12 that Del Monte operates nationwide, features an effective design for distributing millions of cans of peaches, green beans, tomato sauce and 1,800 other SKUs found in the Del Monte pantry. Nearly all products move as full pallets, with lift trucks assigned as the workhorses to keep distribution flowing. Assuring its fleet operates in top form is critical to Lathrop's success.

Three years ago, Del Monte conducted a pilot program to test new fast charge technology as an alternative to traditional battery changing. Based on the pilot's success, Del Monte is now transitioning all of its distribution and manufacturing facilities to the PosiCharge fast charge system from AeroVironment.

"We evaluated various charging systems and PosiCharge was the most energy efficient and versatile," says Glen Lewis, director of energy and indirect procurement.

Del Monte found a number of key advantages to fast charging. The most important benefit was that it improved productivity.

"If you can run a forklift for 16 or 17 hours without having to look for a propane tank or go to a battery changing area, then it is a huge benefit to a facility," says Keith Arntson, distribution manager for Western States. Arntson says productivity suffers when workers performing tasks in a distant part of his 747,000-square-foot facility must travel across the building for a battery change. They also lose time making the exchange and often face a line of trucks waiting to use the hoisting equipment.

In contrast, drivers using the PosiCharge system simply park their vehicles at the fast charging stations during breaks and lunch periods. They quickly connect cables from the charger to the vehicle, then walk away while the unit delivers a high-current charge to the battery. The battery never leaves the vehicle.

Arntson adds that moving to fast charging also reduces potential injuries associated with battery changing, such as lifting heavy batteries with the hoist and the risk of spilling battery acid.

In addition, fewer batteries are needed per truck. Del Monte's remaining vehicles that still require exchanges have two to three batteries each, while only one battery is necessary for fast charging vehicles. Fast charging also requires less floor space, and the chargers can be placed at various locations in the facility based on operational needs.

"The quick charge system is also easier for us to maintain," reports

Bob Johnson, forklift mechanic. Johnson adds that the battery life for fast charging batteries appears to be equal to that of batteries used with the old changing system.

The Lathrop facility is in the process of converting its entire fleet to fast charging. More units will be added as leases expire on remaining trucks currently using traditional batteries. The fast charging has been so successful at Del Monte that its two newest facilities in Fort Worth and Atlanta use only the PosiCharge system for their lift truck fleets comprised of 37 and 32 vehicles, respectively.

For more information on PosiCharge, call 626-357-9983 or visit www.posicharge.com.



The new fast charging systems at Del Monte recharge lift truck batteries quickly during breaks and lunch periods. Drivers simply hook up the chargers to their vehicle batteries and walk away.

To see a three-minute video of Del Monte's Lathrop DC, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on The Speed Challenge.