

AT ISSUE

 Martin Coles, Matrix Polymers



Gas Shortages & Price Rises – Our Industry Has a Problem NOW

In an earlier “At Issue” article, I had flagged up my concerns about our industry’s dependence on gas, particularly in light of the recent NZ Gas Ban (NZ Gas Ban – a Wake-up Call for All Rotomoulders?).

With several countries proposing to ban any new installations of gas infrastructure, I saw this as a long-term problem.

I had no idea that only a few months later, rotomoulders in many parts of the world would pay a heavy price for their gas dependence. Some would have justifiable concerns about getting enough gas to run their factories.

We are experiencing an unprecedented energy crisis. The situation is particularly acute and worrisome here in Europe. Supplies from Russia have been drastically cut due to sanctions on Russia and Russia’s insistence on being paid in Russian Rubles.

Before the war in Ukraine, Germany received over 60% of its gas from Russia, as did many other western and southern European countries.

It is a real concern in Europe that if we get a particularly cold winter, the gas will run out and industry will suffer. Every government will prioritize the supply of heating, lighting, and cooking to domestic users, and everything else will be secondary and possibly rationed.

As a result, the rotomoulding industry faces a real threat in the coming weeks. Will gas supplies be sufficient to heat our industry’s ovens, and will moulders be able to pass on these significantly higher costs to their customers?

I saw a rotomoulder in the UK last week who said the cost of gas had more than tripled.

As gas becomes an increasingly global commodity, rotomoulders are not immune to cost increases, especially due to the surge in LNG that makes gas transportable around the globe.

The good news is that the current energy crisis should give our industry the extra motivation and impetus to become more energy



Image courtesy of Persico

efficient and explore alternative energy sources.

Rotomoulding is a very energy-inefficient process (5-8% of energy is converted into making the mould), and we need to do better. Molders are increasingly interested in investigating technologies such as direct heating moulds (such as AMS Robomould and Persico’s SMART) and asking machine manufacturers like Reinhardt for information on conventional machines that run on renewable electricity rather than gas.

There are lots of other things moulders can do to reduce their energy usage, like improving oven seals to reduce heat loss, optimise the loading of arms, use materials requiring lower PIAT, using more efficient burners and finding ways to reuse exhaust heat.

As a result of this crisis, our industry should use this as an opportunity to become more innovative, and to move away from our dependency on gas. This will enable us to create a sustainable future that is much more energy efficient. ■