

Road Tanker Transfers - Our Safety Philosophy

Static electricity is a phenomenon many of us are well aware of! As early as the 1960's petrochemical companies were so concerned with the hidden dangers of static electricity they conducted scientific research into understanding its physical nature and behaviour. The outcomes of this research proved that the transfer of charged flammable products into or out of tanker trucks was one of many hazardous risks related to uncontrolled discharges of static electricity. An electrostatic discharge from a tanker truck can contain upwards of 1000mJ of energy far exceeding the minimum ignition energy of a broad range of flammable vapours, liquids and dusts.

To illustrate, **Table 1** shows the amount of energy required to ignite many hazardous substances that are transported on a regular basis, whereas **Table 2** shows how much charge potential can accumulate on a road tanker.

In the US the reporting of hazardous incidents related to static is on the increase. NFPA statistics show that on average there are 280 static-related fires and explosions reported to Fire Departments annually, not to mention the number that go unreported, or do not have conclusive proof of static-caused ignition. In Europe alone there is, on average, one major fire or explosion every week, which is linked to uncontrolled discharges of static electricity in hazardous areas.

Electrostatic safety protocols developed by industry experts have been channelled into modern national and international standards ensuring best practise across a range of sectors integrated into petrochemical, pharmaceutical and food and beverage supply chains. Standards like NFPA 77 and Cenelec 50404 recommend the grounding of tanker trucks engaged in the loading or unloading of hazardous cargo. Today, tanker truck grounding is now standard practise for companies engaged in hazardous material transportation.

In the early days of tanker truck grounding there were few cost-effective and time-efficient methods of ensuring that drivers were following tanker truck grounding safety procedures. Allied to this risk was the fact that the majority of systems were made up of basic mechanical devices and cables, which were connected to items assumed to have a low impedance path to ground. However, mechanical and environmental wear and tear can easily inhibit the dissipative capacity of static grounding devices and cables. This situation can be particularly dangerous, as a hazardous incident may be the only indicator that a grounding device or cable was not doing its job effectively. Adding to this complexity, tanker truck drivers in the modern era are assessed against metrics which are often linked to bonus incentives like on time delivery. As plant asset utilisation is a key accounting metric, production managers and engineers are increasingly working to tighter schedules in order to get work in progress to the next level of production. These time pressures translate back along the supply chain to product delivery schedules. Given these pressures it is easy to see why drivers can forget to ground their tanker trucks, or worse still, underestimate the importance of grounding tanker trucks.

In response to market demands Newson Gale developed the Earth-Rite PLUS *RTR*[™] (Road Tanker Recognition), which challenged this lack of visibility and accountability. The guiding principle of the *RTR*[™] development project was that the tanker truck body had to be continuously connected to ground before, during and after the transfer process.

To achieve this; two key conditions needed to be satisfied to ensure that personnel and assets were protected from static related hazard:

A: how could human decision making be controlled such that the driver had no choice but to follow a set protocol of grounding the tanker truck?

B: how could personnel be confident the tanker truck always had a reliable ground connection and would not be impeded from dissipating static over an infinite number of loading cycles?

contd.

Minimum Ignition Energies (MIE) of regularly transported gases, vapours and dusts in milli-joules (mJ).

	Material	MIE (mJ)
Liquid Vapour Gas	Gasoline	0.80
	Ethanol	0.65
	Propanol	0.65
	Ethyl acetate	0.46
	Methane	0.28
	Propane	0.25
	Ethane	0.24
	Hexane	0.24
	Methanol	0.14
	Acetylene	0.017
	Hydrogen	0.011
	Carbon disulphide	0.009
	Powder	Zinc
Wheat flour		50
Polyethylene		30
Sugar		30
Magnesium		20
Sulphur		15
Aluminium		10
Epoxy resin		9
Zirconium		5

Table 1: Minimum Ignition Energy of explosive / flammable materials (Source: IChemE)

Stored Energy on Common Objects

Object	Capacitance (Pico Farads)	Stored energy @ 10kV (mJ)	Stored energy @ 30kV (mJ)
Tanker Truck	5000	250	2250
Person	200	10	90
Bucket	20	1	9
100mm flange	10	0.5	4.5
1/2" bolt	3	0.15	1.5

Table 2: Electrical energy stored on a range of common objects (Source: IChemE)



To ensure optimum product performance and reliability Newson Gale policy advocates the inclusion of international standards and best practice guidelines into product solutions.

For this project the challenge for the development team was to identify which parameters, supported by international standards, would indicate that personnel were working in known safe conditions.

Early in the development project it was clear that to control the risk of static ignition, the most effective and relevant output of the system would be its capability to control the flow of hazardous material. Cenelec 50404 (5.4.4.1.2) supports this theory by recommending the use of interlocks to prevent loading of hazardous material when the grounding cable is not connected, while NFPA 77 (8.6 – Precautions for loading tank vehicles) states: "... ground indicators, often interlocked with the filling system, to ensure bonding is in place....". As a result the development team incorporated interlocking capability into the product solution.

To satisfy condition B*, the engineers designed the system to monitor resistance in the circuit between the tanker truck and the high integrity ground connection. This functionality enabled the system to continuously monitor the integrity of the circuit so that it engaged a fail-safe output when a specified threshold resistance was exceeded. NFPA 77 (6.4.1.3) was adopted as the target parameter for circuit monitoring. Although different standards advocate a variety of resistance values as being adequate for dissipating static, NFPA states that electrical resistance in a continuous grounding and bonding circuit should be less than 10 ohms. Levels of resistance higher than this indicates a potential fault with the circuit. This principle fits perfectly with the idea of monitoring the integrity of the circuit. If the system detects a spike above this threshold it can engage the interlock indicating a potential fault with the circuit. The key value proposition of this solution is the capability of the system to monitor resistance in real time ensuring static is dissipated effectively and offsetting the expenses associated with routine maintenance checks or the risk of them not being carried out on a regular basis.

As continuous monitoring of the circuit requires constant contact with the tanker truck body, this method was expanded to satisfy condition A* by making the tanker truck body an identifiable circuit component. For this to work the tanker truck needed to possess electrical properties that provided a means of isolating and measuring a unique, identifiable parameter. Research into the capacity of tanker trucks to generate and store charge had shown that the majority of tanker trucks share a similar band of electrical capacitance (ref: Table 2). Given that this electrical property is measurable and likely to be a consistent parameter across industrial road tanker trucks, the engineers developed the theory of identifying tanker trucks based on their values of electrical capacitance. The early phases of the R+D process established 2 key parameters that could satisfy the technical challenge of ensuring that:

(a): the tanker trucks body would have a parameter uniquely identifiable for confirmation based on capacitance (Farad).

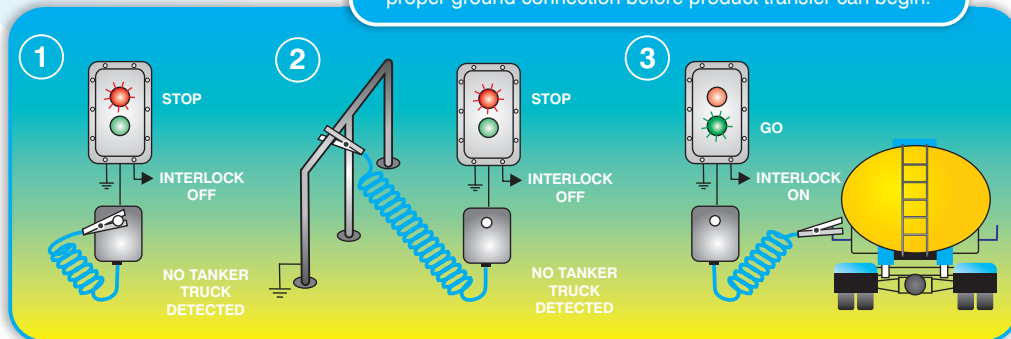
(b): the circuit would have a benchmark parameter of resistance such that a rise above 10 ohms could be instantaneously measured and detected by the system.

In the hardware development phase of the project the engineers investigated the opportunity of measuring and verifying both these parameters via one mode of measured impedance. To provide some background, electrical impedance in a circuit is made up of varying values of resistance, capacitance and inductance. Inductance was discounted, as no significant sources of inductance would be present in the circuit or local area of a tanker truck.

Testing of the first prototype highlighted concerns about the reliability of this method. It was possible to enable the system go permissive when the values of capacitance and resistance were outside their safety critical limits. In the interests of developing a reliable solution, Newson Gale discarded the idea of using one mode of measurement for tanker truck grounding.

In order to ensure that only a tanker truck specifically and a resistance value of ≤ 10 ohms could enable material transfer to take place, the development team decided to measure the capacitance of the tanker truck and the resistance in the circuit independently of each other. This operating principle ensured there could be no interference between both modes of measurement, thus eliminating spurious and inaccurate data that implied satisfactory earthing conditions. This would require the system to perform 2 modes of measurement. One mode that exclusively sought the presence of a tanker truck and the other mode that independently ensured electrical resistance levels in the static dissipative circuit were continuously monitored to a level of ≤ 10 ohms. If neither of these dual conditions was satisfied then material transfer could not commence or continue if initial conditions were satisfactory. The Dual Mode principle provided the optimum level of product performance and reliability, by measuring both parameters independently and by ensuring the system only went permissive if (a) and (b) were verified.

Tanker truck recognition and continuous monitoring of a proper ground connection before product transfer can begin.



Testing of the Dual Mode concept proved that the tanker truck recognition component of the technology was capable of isolating and recognising the presence of tanker trucks. This combined well with the circuit-monitoring component, which verified if the circuit was in a good enough condition to dissipate static. This proved the tanker truck recognition mode, combined with the resistance monitoring mode, would only engage an interlock provided the narrow band of truck capacitance and circuit resistance of ≤ 10 ohms were independently measured and verified. To summarise if the system is connected to objects other than a tanker truck, the tanker truck recognition component of Dual Mode technology will not permit the transfer of hazardous material. If the resistance in the static dissipative circuit rises above 10 ohms, the circuit-monitoring component will not permit the transfer of hazardous material.

In summary unless both conditions are satisfied, Dual Mode technology will ensure that personnel and company assets are not put at risk.

contd.

Over the past ten years Dual Mode technology has proven extremely reliable in real world operating conditions. To illustrate, grounding systems that use tanker truck recognition can suffer from parallel resistance shorting out the capacitance of tanker trucks present in wet conditions especially in coastal areas where the atmosphere has higher concentrations of salt. Combined values of tanker truck capacitance and resistance can affect the lower threshold value of capacitive reactance, meaning the tanker truck identification part of many systems need to be shutdown or overridden. The most suitable alternative to this scenario is to have a supervisor present at each loading point to ensure drivers are grounding their tanker trucks. Unfortunately this is not a cost-effective nor a 100% foolproof substitute for ensuring road tanker trucks are correctly grounded. With the *RTR*[™] system, the tanker truck recognition check is not as sensitive to damp or salty conditions meaning tanker truck recognition overrides are less commonplace. This level of reliability provides equipment owners and end-users with a unique competitive advantage maintaining continuous material transfer without sacrificing the safety of personnel and company assets.

Now in its 10th year on the market, Newson-Gale's newly improved Earth-Rite PLUS *RTR*[™] (with Dual Mode technology) is synonymous with high quality product performance and reliability and has become the benchmark technology for road tanker truck grounding.

In line with the company's policy of continuous product development and improvement, the Earth-Rite PLUS *RTR*[™] is being approved for full Factory Mutual listing for use in locations classified as Class I, Division 1, Groups B, C, D; Class II, Division 1, Groups E, F, G; & Class III.

The Earth-Rite PLUS *RTR*[™] forms part of Newson-Gale's comprehensive range of Cenelectrex ground monitoring and indicating systems designed for the safe control of static in hazardous areas.

For further information with regards to this article or any of our Cenelectrex[®] range of products or services, please do not hesitate to contact us.

This issue of Ear to the Ground was compiled by the Editorial Team at Newson Gale.

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