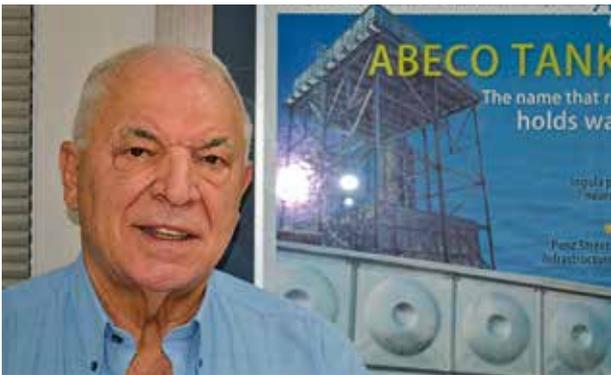


Getting through the driest of seasons

The need for adequate onsite storage has never been more prevalent than during the current drought, with water intensive mining operations needing large storage capacities, or bust.



Mannie Ramos

Temperatures are increasing steadily across the country, as rainfall patterns change and water grows scarcer, which could be the natural cycle of El Nino, or a more prolonged global warming. Either way, companies need to be storing more water, and making better use of grey water systems, to take the pressure off above and underground rivers and dams.

One of the leaders in the production of industrial size tanks in South Africa is Abeco Tanks, which was started by Mannie Ramos back in 1983, and has grown from the strength to strength.

The company's aim was satisfying the ever increasing need for the hygienic storage of life's essential resource – water. So they went about developing the most cost effective solutions to water storage needs without compromising safety, hygiene quality or durability.

Using modern technology Abeco has become a leading innovator in the development of water storage solutions. Gregory Simpson sat down with the knowledgeable Ramos recently for more on the development of storage tanks, for a variety of fluids.

How has the design of tanks changed over the years to increase storage capacity and reduce evaporation?

The design, although refined, is still the same product that was offered in 1983. We still offer safe hygienic water storage which is unaffected by ultraviolet or light penetration, easily transportable to remote locations and quick and easy to install using basic equipment and manual labour. We have, however, changed the steel used to supraform steel which has improved formability. Individual roof sheets reduce evaporation and are available in 1mm thick, 305mm wide or 2.5mm thick, 610mm wide.

What level of R n D goes into developing tanks?

We have a designated area of the factory which is used to test panels for both different material and material thickness in accordance with SANS 10329:2010 Ed1.2. We also test the various components of the tanks. Over the years we have ensured quality control by applying best working practice and current international standards. We currently hold the following:

- ISO 9001:2008 certified
- The SABS certification mark
- In respect of the different sectors we supply we are:
- A.S.I.B. approved
- A Member of the Water Institute of South Africa
- A Member of the Southern African Institute of Steel Construction
- A Member of the International Steel Fabricators of South Africa

How has the water shortage affected your business, and the need for adequate on-site reserves?

With the increasingly high water-consumption behaviours and the growing urban, domestic and industrial water usage there is a strain on the municipal water supply and a need to promote water conservation. In rural areas, piped-in water is non-existent and water tanks provide the means to get water to the people. Planning for drought is the key point for a successful mitigation policy and with Abeco being able to supply and install adequate on-site reserves, making sure that is water available. Water storage is essential in order to meet all of the domestic, industrial and fire demands.

How can business and the public be encouraged to make better use of grey water systems to prepare better?

Business and the public need to be made aware that reused water is an option to address the increasing mismatch between available water resources and rising demand by reducing the demand for fresh water resources.

It should be considered especially in our city centres where there are decaying water infrastructures and capacity constraints, and in projects of urban renewal. There is a risk that responsibilities are blurred between municipalities, property owners, technology suppliers, and service providers.

Business and the public should be presented with awards where they have voluntarily made significant contributions. Private water recycling efforts should be recognised in government publications and websites.

Basically, information dissemination and educational outreach are probably the most common mechanisms.

How best to make large tanks safe and protected against harsh UV rays?

Our tanks are galvanised so unaffected by ultraviolet or light penetration.

Have you seen a marked increase in water wise practises in the last five years, areas of possible improvement in the future?

There has definitely been an increase in water-consumption behaviours in the last five years and with the growth in urban, domestic and industrial water usage there is a strain on the municipal water supply. Risks are driven by unsustainable watershed conditions such as water scarcity, pollution, or weak water governance. Weak water governance often results in erratic water deliveries which affect production delays so there needs to be more focus on the promotion of water conservation.

Keys to running a successful 'family' business since way back 1983; you must have seen a lot of changes in the mining industry, and the approach to water management?

I started the company in 1983, initially focusing on growing the business then leading by personal example and encouraging all employees to conduct their activities in accordance with the company's standards and policies. More recently I've looked at the company's succession and I've gone about bringing in young leaders, who are dedicated to building the organisation rather than their CVs.

We have seen a lot of changes in the mining industry and focus on health and safety requirement which differ completely from one mine to the next. There is much more focus on installing adequate on-site reserves. Through our quality products we have maintained touch with our customers and been able to provide excellent backup service.

How can tanks be adapted to different fuels vs. water, or does one size virtually fit all?

In today's market, integrated storage systems are available that remove the problems of yesterday. We are able to specialise in integrated storage systems, prescribing the right tank design tailored for our clients requirements and together with strategic partners are able to remedy the storage problems of the past by prescribing the correct variables of hopper slope, outlet size, outlet configurations, materials of construction and surface finish, active flow-aid devices, passive flow-aid devices, internal and external coatings systems, applicable codes and the correct flow type required for reliable material flow.

How has the rand devaluation affected your business?

Currently our greatest challenge is competing against foreign fabricators that have encroached on our markets sourced from all around the globe at competitive prices. The devaluation of the rand has made us competitive in our core product but our powder coated circular tank range is imported and is drastically affected by the rand. We have also automated large portions of our workshop and these machines are sourced from Europe and the price is dependent on the exchange rate.

Plans for the future and expansion into Africa, key growth areas?

Africa is the future but it is not for the faint hearted and we have been able to overcome the barriers to entry and stick it out, to date we have supplied over 30 countries with our tanks. In July 2013 we adapted our product range to take us into the waste water, dry bulk storage and digester markets by adding a powder coated circular tank, to our range, which can go up to 30ML and is the #1 performance interior tank lining available for water and wastewater storage applications worldwide.

The powder on powder system provides unmatched performance compared to ALL exterior bolted tank coatings. These tanks are supplied with steel roofs or aluminum geodesic domes, which are the best dome cover in the market place for water and waste water applications. Across the next few years aluminum geodesic domes will be the specified "product of choice" for all types of liquid storage containment tanks. Steel tanks are rapidly replacing concrete tanks across Europe as concrete is not standing up to the test of time.

How do we rate versus overseas competition in terms of innovation and usability?

The brand has been successfully built up over the last 33 years and is now well known throughout Africa with more Abeco water tanks erected in southern Africa than any other tank. So we have been more than able to hold our own against overseas competition.

Gregory Simpson