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Interview: Dirk Martin on APATEQ oil water separation solution

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Dirk Martin, chief sales officer, APATEQ, discusses the company's oil water separation technology.

Tell us about APATEQ's water treatment technology and applications.

APATEQ - PWT S.A. develops and manufactures turn-key, custom designed oil-water separation systems for oilfield operators, compact wastewater treatment plants for demanding applications and pre-treatment systems for the treatment of industrial wastewater. With decades of experience in the water and wastewater business and global industrial product manufacturing and commercialization, APATEQ's corporate and technical team is comprised of dedicated experts whose focused goal is client satisfaction, environmental protection and water conservation.

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Recently APATEQ's oil water separation technology won 2014 European Technology Innovation Leadership Award. What was the innovation?

"OilPac" is a turn-key, custom designed oil-water separation system for oil and gas fields, engineered, manufactured and supplied by APATEQ of Luxembourg. For the treatment of produced water, APATEQ combines proprietary pre-treatment and ultrafiltration technology to outperform actual and long-established treatment solutions.

Current technologies available on the market such as electrocoagulation, centrifuges, pure chemical treatment or evaporation all have in common the use of large amounts of energy or chemicals, or both which leads to higher operational costs. Most of these processes do not use membranes, because oil often tends to cover and clog the membranes' pores. Typically, organic and ceramic membranes will last only minutes before they are clogged.

APATEQ developed a proprietary, breakthrough technology for oil-water separation to be implemented at oil and gas fields, for groundwater remediation and oil spillages. Our technology excels over all other processes in the industry, separating even emulsified oil from water without requiring additional chemicals compared to conventional processes, removing free and suspended solids in produced water to a level of less than 1 ppm, with 100 percent usability of the recovered oil for further processing in refineries and treating the water to a high level for re-use, at low operating expenses and a very small footprint. The systems are supplied as container plants (ISO shipping containers) or rack-based systems, both easily scalable to meet specific customer requirements for volumes.

What are its ROI, efficiency gains of this membrane technology? Any real estimates?

Due to the minimal, or in some cases no use of chemicals in the process and due to the very low energy consumption of the system, the operation costs of the OilPaq are kept to a minimum, representing only a fraction of the treatment costs of conventional processes. Depending on the application, the quality of influent water and the required specifications for the effluent water, a ROI as early as 12 – 18 months is feasible.

Who are the major customers? How has the adoption of APATEQ's oil-water separation system been so far?

We had an oil-water separation plant running at a European client's site for around 3 months, treating produced water from almost 30 different wells, alternating every day without the need to change hardware and process. A modified version of this plant is currently operational in North America for six months lasting program of on-demand, on-site produced water treatment in the USA and Canada. The target of the road show is to raise awareness of our product and technology in order to enter the North American market.

In 2013, within six months of foundation, APATEQ sold several compact, containerized wastewater treatment plants to North America. In May 2014 we received an order for a system for the treatment of industrial process water of an Italian agricultural (fruit) cooperative, thus entering the industrial market with our solution.

What are your major markets? Any expansion plans?

According to the product range offered, APATEQ targets:

- Oil and gas field operators for its oil-water separation systems
- Remote municipalities, men camps, resorts, hotels etc. for its compact wastewater treatment system
- Water consuming industries for its pre-treatment systems
- Landfill operators for its leachate treatment system
- Shipping Industry to treat the water resulting from scrubber systems employed to reduce the exhaust gases from the ship's engines when running on heavy oil.

Today APATEQ addresses the European, US and Canadian market.

Mid-term we will also expand to the Middle East and South America and after that on to Asia.

Who are your technology partners?

APATEQ collaborates with the Luxembourgish Agency for Innovation and Research "Luxinnovation", the Public Research Center Henri Tudor in as well as the University of Luxembourg.

Who are your major competitions in the market? What is your market share in wastewater segment across the world?

There are a few big and established players on the market who hold the largest market share.

In terms of market size: in the USA alone today there are approx. 680.000 oil wells and approximately 13.000 new oil wells are opened every year. Some sources estimated the produced water market in North America to be approx. USD 5 billion in 2010 and to grow to approx. USD 10 billion in 2025. At every oil well, or gas well for that matter, there is an inherent issue with water and its treatment before re-injection or disposal. The older the well becomes, the more water is produced. The ratio of oil / water could reach levels as high as 10 percent oil and 90 percent water. APATEQ targets to become state-of-the-art solution for oil-water separation.

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