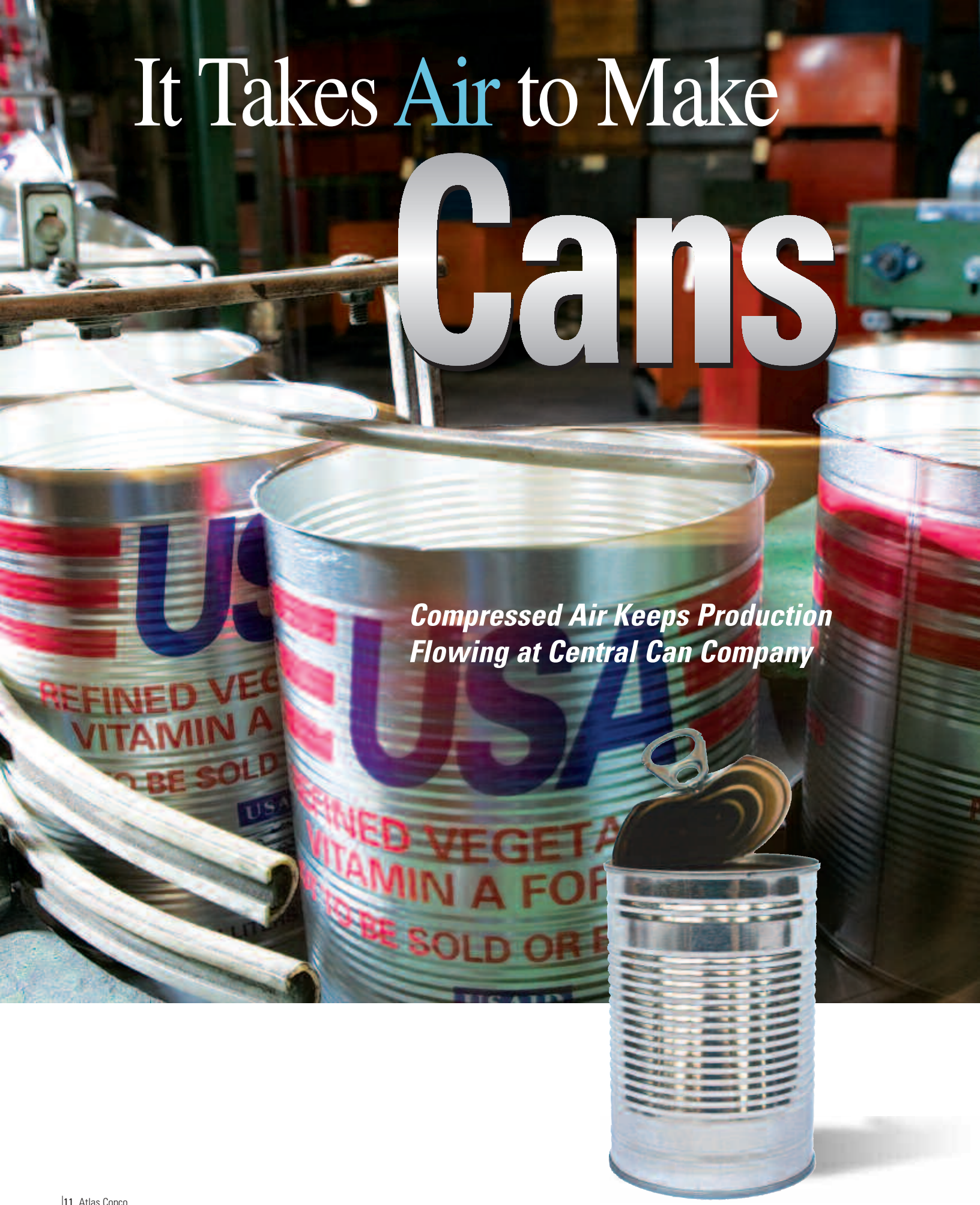
It Takes Air to Make Cans

Compressed Air Keeps Production Flowing at Central Can Company



According to the Can Manufacturers Institute, Americans use more than 130 billion cans each year. Can making is an $8 billion dollar industry, with 200 manufacturing plants in 38 states employing more than 35,000 people.

When you pick up a gallon of paint at the hardware store or a can of soup at the supermarket, you typically think of the contents as the product you're buying, but you're also buying the metal can in which the contents were packed, shipped and displayed. Give the can due consideration and you realize it's the can that makes it possible to market the contents.

The can helps make the products consumers want safer, less expensive, more convenient, and more readily available. Thanks to the wonderfully utilitarian can, an enormous range of household and commercial goods stand ready until needed. Useful but potentially hazardous products stay safely contained. Foods that are out of season and products made at another time and location are available most anywhere. When the contents are removed and its role as container is over, the empty can is recyclable.

One of the nation's leading producers of high quality metal and plastic containers is Central Can Company. An 81-year-old, privately owned corporation based in Chicago, Central Can Company manufactures products to store paints, adhesives, sealants, coatings, food products and more.

"We manufacture over 1,000 different customized products," according to Terry L. Kline, President and CEO of Central Can Company. "Everything that goes into a metal can, including the plug and ears, we make in-house. We offer custom metal decorating, cutting, and lithography services as well. Our operation is high speed and high precision, and it relies in great measure on compressed air. In fact, every piece of manufacturing, testing and packaging equipment we use has some component operated by air. Each one of our six air compressor systems is an Atlas Copco."

Central Can uses Atlas Copco GA WorkPlace oil-injected rotary screw compressors in sizes matched for the various pneumatic applications in the plant's production and warehouse processes. WorkPlace systems combine high operating efficiency and reliability with low noise levels. The air compressor, filters and dryer are integrated into a compact cabinet that enables the compressed air system to be located where it's needed in the work place, rather than in a remotely located compressor room.

Manufacturing Steel Containers

Steel cans are manufactured at Central Can Company 24 hours a day, 5 days a week. Their manufacture begins with coiled steel, sheared into a flat sheet of metal, which is then formed into a cylinder of the desired dimensions. The overlapping metal ends are fed between copper welding wheels, which remove tin from the steel as heat is conducted to form a neat longitudinal seam.

"Metals of different thickness and with various coatings require specific degrees of force on the welding wheels," explains Plant Manager Charlie Hushka. "That force is controlled using compressed air. The type of bottom attached to a metal container depends on the application, and a variety of machinery is used to complete the can with the appropriate bottom."

Every metal container manufactured by Central Can is tested for leaks using compressed air. Each container is pressurized and a tester monitors pressure outside of the container. If pressure is higher outside the container, it indicates a leak.

"It's interesting that a metal pail used to package coatings is itself sprayed with a lining," says Hushka. "We paint the entire metal pail — inside or outside or both — at the same time. Spindles rotate the container, and a pneumatic painting system running through guns and nozzles paints the interior and exterior of the can simultaneously with two different paints and no overspray. It's fast and precise, and compressed air makes it possible."

New Plastic Manufacturing Operation

Central Can recently made a strategic decision to enter the plastic manufacturing marketplace. "Traditionally we've manufactured strictly steel containers, but we have added injection molding capabilities," according to Kline. "For water-based paints, the transition from metal to plastic paint cans is gaining momentum. We saw an opportunity and decided to start producing plastic cans, too."

Kline emphasizes that Central Can remains committed to making metal paint cans. "About twenty percent of the paint sold in the U.S. is solvent based, and some of those solvents will dissolve a plastic container. But the growth market is plastic, so we made a substantial investment in state-of-the-art injection molding machines and support systems."

Compressed air is a fundamental resource for the injection molding process. It opens and closes various parts of the molding machinery and expels the molded product out of the machine. Naturally, an air compressor system was part of the investment in manufacturing equipment. "We have had success with our Atlas Copco compressors," Hushka says, "so when we went into plastics we didn't really look into alternatives."

With the assistance of Dan Terrini, Sales Representative at Atlas Copco's Chicago Compressor Center, a water-cooled GA37FF was selected. "Central Can's injection molding room is humidity and temperature controlled, and they have a closed-loop system of chilled water to support the injection molding process. We tapped that to provide water to cool the compressor system. Selecting a water cooled compressor also means we don't have to vent heat outside."

Terrini points out that the GA37FF was installed on the molding room floor with no negative impact to the work environment. "The compressor is one of the quietest pieces of equipment in the molding room," Terrini explains. Locating the compressor in the injection molding room minimized installation costs. It also improves operating efficiency by putting the compressor right where air is required.

Central Can Company's plastics manufacturing operation runs continuously and was designed for uninterrupted production, even when an air compressor is off-line for service. "We can tap into the compressed air system from the warehouse when needed," Hushka says. "Even if we have to take the molding room compressor off line for service or maintenance, we keep working."

Reliable in Operation

Each of the six Atlas Copco GA compressors in operation at Central Can was purchased to replace an old compressor. "I've had experience with other compressor brands," says Hushka, "and I find the Atlas Copco compressors are more reliable and easier to maintain. For example, oil and oil filter changes are much more straightforward than what we experienced in the past with other compressors."

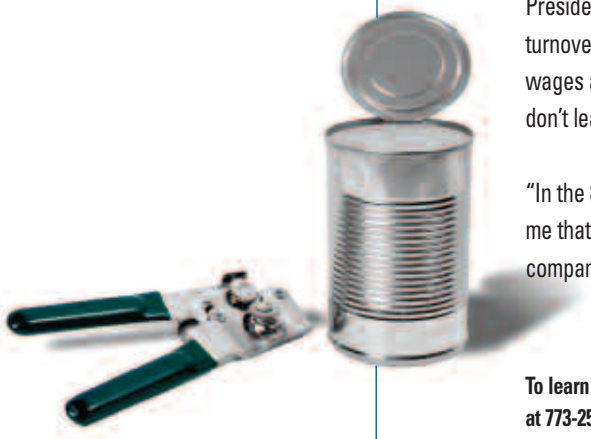
Terrini points out that Atlas Copco handles all of the planned maintenance for Central Can. "They rely on Atlas Copco, and we keep them going."

Essential Role, Little Fanfare

While cans rarely make headlines, they continue to play an essential role in the global marketplace by enabling manufacturers to package, store, ship, display and deliver the products their customers want. Central Can Company continues to advance the state-of-the-art for that important but unsung hero of contemporary living, the can.

WorkPlace Systems: Quiet, Compact, Efficient

Central Can has located their compressors directly on the shop floor at strategic spots throughout the manufacturing plant and warehouse to feed the main central air lines and receiving tanks. "A lot of our manufacturing equipment is loud," says Plant Manager Charlie Hushka, "but not our Atlas Copco air compressors. Even in the warehouse where it's not as loud we put compressors in the work area. They're quiet and don't take up much space, so there isn't any need to hide them away in a remote compressor room."



Treating People Right

The average plant employee at Central Can Company has been with the company for more than 15 years. President and CEO Terry Kline thinks he knows why the company has such loyal employees and so little turnover. "We respect one another. We communicate with each other. We treat people well through wages and benefits and work environment. The result is, when new employees join us they typically don't leave. Due to all of these factors, we're also a non-union manufacturer.

"In the 81 years we've been in business we have never laid off a plant employee. It's not surprising to me that we have such a loyal workforce. People talk about 'corporate culture,' but in reality how well a company works is simply a reflection of how well you treat one another."

To learn more about Central Can Company, please call the company's Chicago headquarters at 773-254-8700 or visit:

www.centralcancompany.com