

Keeping the Site & SAFE & TIDY

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Tulip Corporation is a company that has been around since 1940, so in this 75th anniversary year it is appropriate to note that the company keeps moving forward.

Written by John Boley

Known for all of that time for its high-quality moulded rubber hydraulic seals and its range of packings for rotary and reciprocating hydraulic equipment, Tulip has been a favourite supplier to the hydro-electric schemes throughout the country, which rely on the company's products for critical seals – in many cases, it is the only company in Australia trusted to make such vital components. There is an element here of technical expertise; in a lot of instances no other company would have the necessary experience to come up with what the customer needs.

Tulip is the can-do supplier, conscious of the fact that 'just a seal' is rather important – if it fails, that little component could mean an outage of millions of dollars.

Around ten years ago the company branched out, launching an engineering division featuring full CNC manufacturing facilities. Tulip Industrial, part of the Tulip Group, was formed to accommodate a wider variety of overlapping but distinct business sectors as interests and turnover grew.

One interest developed rather naturally, as National Sales Manager Graeme Adam explains. From their headquarters in Hallam, some 40km southeast of Melbourne, executives would drive around to clients and on their travels

would see many building sites. "Frequently we would see shade cloth blowing off buildings," he explains. A so-common sight that many people would not register it, but it set Tulip's staff to thinking that there might be better ways of covering a site during the construction or renovation phase. "So we decided to take a look at designing something that might do the job better."

It took around four years, but what came out of this think tank was a range of products under the brand ScaffGuard®. Now in the marketplace for some five years, it is likely any reader will have seen ScaffGuard® instead of dingy shade cloth on construction sites across Australia – though again, most people probably don't notice things like a scaffold containment system until it falls off.

That is the whole point of ScaffGuard®. It has been purpose-designed to not only meet all the regulations but to do a much better job of containment. It is more wind-resistant; tougher; lighter in weight; weather resistant; and less unsightly than other containment systems.

ScaffGuard® and its associated brands are something of a departure from Tulip's traditional business, says Graeme, but is accommodated under the group's business interests, not least because of the reputation the Tulip brand has established over such a long period of time. It's a little ▶▶

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fits any standard scaffolding pallet and has a capacity of 750kg. Weighing only 10kg, Scafftub is very light and easy to handle.

Another interesting speciality of Tulip Group is the Squirrel, one of those inventions that is so clever because it is so simple. Squirrel is a safety device, made in one piece from a light-weight engineered nylon, that fits around the wheel nuts of a truck. There are many incidents involving wheel loss on heavy vehicles, sometimes resulting in death or serious injury (for a really scary example, check a CCTV video on Tulip’s website, where a man filling his car at a gas station is bowled over by a fast-moving loose wheel). A major cause of wheel loss is when the nuts lose torque and vibrate off. The Squirrel prevents nuts from turning under that vibration. It’s such an elegantly simple life-saver that it is in considerable demand for export as well as use throughout Australia; Tulip is shipping them by the thousand to the US as well.

As for ScaffGuard® itself, there have been noises from legislators about making full containment mandatory on commercial construction sites, but that varies from state to state and Tulip is not holding its breath. In the meantime, the system has begun to be specified by a number of major construction companies. It has become a familiar sight on-site, and Tulip Group confidently looks forward to its becoming the norm over the coming years. There are sample panels in the UK and the company is expecting to appoint distributors there and in some other markets too in the near future. ■

► more complicated than merely injection moulding plastic sheet; the four-year development phase included many field trials on real sites that highlighted just how difficult it is to keep a building site tidy. “Many times we thought we had it right, but then we would ask more of the product and have to go back and modify it,” Graeme explains.

By the time Tulip had the system sorted – a decision which was taken after considerable consultation with scaffolding companies to ensure nothing had been missed – the whole country, not to mention the construction industry, was in the icy grip of the GFC. Despite all the gloom and doom, the feedback from the industry regarding this new containment system was “fantastic,” says Graeme. The only downside was that the comments were coming from companies with piles of equipment in their yards, rather than on site where they should have been, because work was so scarce.

In fact, the scaffolding sector is not used to a stream of innovation; one senior member of this industry described ScaffGuard® as “the most significant development of the last 25 years,” such was the advance it represented. It is a replacement for all other types of containment including chain mesh as well as cloth; it also replaces cumbersome steel mesh brick guards which are so heavy. With ScaffGuard® there are none of the health and safety issues that can crop up with sharp edges and wire with metal products; the system is quickly installed and is light-weight. Although the size of individual panels (there are several

options but the length of a regular panel is from 1270mm to 2440 mm) will normally necessitate two staff members to move, the pieces are light enough for them to move many at a time. All these benefits are appreciated by companies operating in the minefields of Western Australia and Queensland too, where climate resistance is duly tested.

After much experimentation, Tulip chose UV stabilised, high impact polypropylene for the panels and associated fittings; after careful testing and evaluation, it was decided that only local Australian manufacture could attain both the quality standards and consistency required of what is, after all, an important safety item. Thus ScaffGuard® is proudly Australian through and through. “As regards manufacturing, we were more concerned about quality than price,” says Graeme.

Since the gradual recovery of the industry began, ScaffGuard® has really taken off, as it were, proving increasingly popular with the scaffolding companies themselves despite a certain change of mindset that is required to adopt the system. Scaffguard is very much a re-usable component of a site, unlike something like shade cloth, and needs to be accounted for over a period of life that Graeme says should be at least five years, such is its toughness. Instead of being a consumable, it becomes a capital asset and something that a scaffolding company can include in a tender as a point of differentiation for its services – a winner with clients who see not only safety benefits but the PR advantage of a clean, tidy site.

ScaffGuard® comes in green or blue as standard, but is available in other colours subject to minimum order quantities and can even be supplied with moulded branding – the name of the scaffolder, for example, or even that of a construction company.

“It’s a bit of a change of thinking for the scaffolding companies, who are used to writing off containment on the first job,” says Graeme, “but everyone who uses the system has seen the cost being covered in the first couple of jobs and from then on it is a profit centre.”

Associated products include SiteGuard, a similar design that provides impact- and weather-resistant temporary semi-rigid barriers suitable for crowd control, pedestrian diversions around road works, and mining and other resource sites. There is also Scafftub, a tough UV stabilised high density polyethylene tub that

