

# A manufacturer's experience and perspective on the ATEX Directive

By Jamie Dummer, RGS Electro-Pneumatics Ltd.

**The so-called ATEX Directive comes into force on 1st July 2003. Given the complexity of the material and the implications for both makers and users of products covered by this Directive, Valve World asked Jamie Dummer, of RGS Electro-Pneumatics, to give his experiences and perspective of the ATEX Directive.**

Firstly, it is important to look at what the "ATEX Directive" actually is. The term is derived from the French "ATmospheres EXplosibles", which translates as potentially explosive atmospheres. Vive la difference! The EC Directive is 94/9/EC (The "Equipment Directive"), which was adopted into local law in the UK as "Equipment and Protective Systems Intended for use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres 1996"; generally known as the ATEX Directive. There are some philosophical and practical differences between the "old" and "new" approach directives. Philosophical differences

## Further reading

For further information about the ATEX Directive, please visit [www.europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/atex/guide](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/atex/guide). The site includes the text of 94/9/EC, an explanation of the basis of the New Approach Directives, FAQs and guidelines on the application of the directive.

include:

- The ATEX directive is, at least in theory, less prescriptive.
- Conformity to the Essential Health and Safety Requirements (EHSRs) is all that is required in order to be approved.
- The extent to which manufacturers move away from the established explosion safety standards has yet to be seen.

Practical differences as we see them at RGS include:

- Approval for dust hazards.
- Plastic components, particularly in the housing, allow the possibility of the retention of static charge.
- Painted external surfaces.
- Assessment of potential mechanical as well as electrical sources of ignition.

In practical terms, the all-important date is 1st July 2003. After that date, all installed CENELEC approved product continues to be acceptable. All CENELEC approved product that has been "placed onto the market" (i.e., supplied from the OEM to stockist, distributor, intermediary or end-user) before 1st July 2003 and is "ready to use" (i.e., not requiring further assembly) may continue to be traded and sold after this date. However, new product entering the market must be ATEX approved.

The issue of spare parts should also be considered. As we understand it, spares that do not themselves require certification may be supplied after 1st July 2003 to maintain non-ATEX products. Spares that do require approval will have to be approved to ATEX after that date, but can still be fitted to a non-ATEX product. In both cases the spares can be fitted "as long as no substantial modi-

fication" is required. From 1st July 2003 the manufacturer must cease to supply CENELEC approved product into the EC. It may however still be supplied outside the EC.

## Market reaction

As may be expected, the reaction of the market can be divided into "early adopters" and "laggards". Early adopters are already calling for ATEX approved product to be specified. In many instances companies have already set dates well in advance of 1st July 2003, from when all subsequent supply must be ATEX approved. By contrast, if the adoption of the Pressure Equipment Directive (PED) is anything to go by, there will also be a large number of customers who

## About RGS

RGS is part of the Parmeko Group, comprising 200 people, 4 manufacturing sites and with a Euro 14 million turnover.

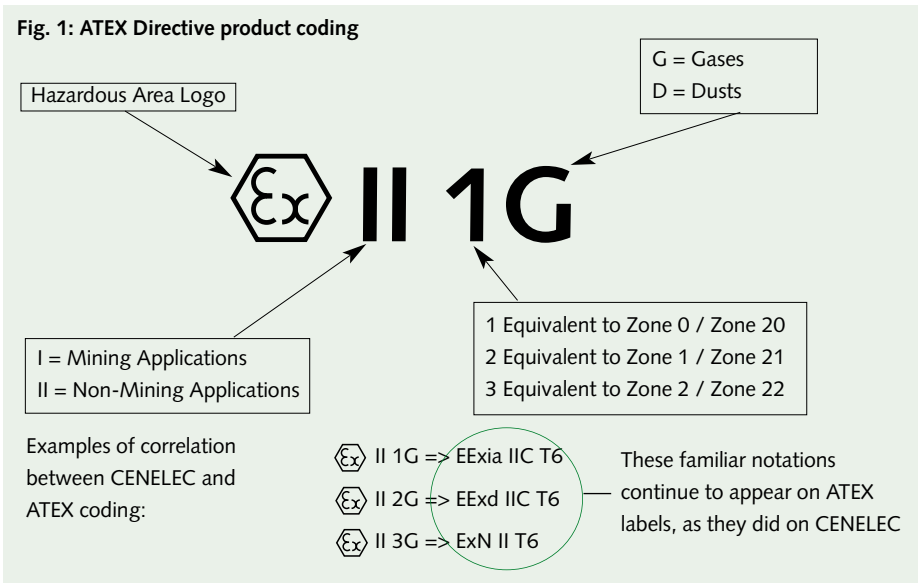
Group focus is the provision of high quality mechanical and electro-mechanical products to the hydraulics and pneumatics industries, serving applications such as process control, valve actuation, railways and off-highway vehicles.

RGS was established over 40 years ago and has been part of the Parmeko Group plc since 1989.

RGS operates from its modern production facility near Accrington, England. It currently employs 55 people and has a turnover of Euro 4 million.

RGS's 3,000 sq. metre production facility has facilities for: CNC machining, turning and injection moulding; CMM and SPC inspection techniques; dry and wet painting; cylinder/linear actuator manufacturing, assembly and testing; solenoid valve assembly and testing; prototype development and testing facilities.

Fig. 1: ATEX Directive product coding



will only start asking about the change in the last few weeks before 1st July 2003. Also, it is true that ATEX approved product is a legitimate alternative to CENELEC and can be supplied as a direct substitute - subject to customer acceptance.

RGS's plans are to avoid most of the problems associated with non-ATEX product "placed on the market" by purging the sup-

ply chain ahead of 1st July 2003. RGS is already supplying Ex II 1 G (EExia IIC T6) and Ex II 2 G (EExd IIC T6) to order. All products for which ATEX certificates have been issued are being supplied as ATEX versions as standard from 1st January 2003. Several approvals have already been gained and others are in the pipeline. It is a good job these approvals were requested when

they were as the backlog with approvals bodies is now a big concern. As part of the ATEX Directive, it should also be noted that installation and maintenance manuals should be multilingual, providing all information required by ATEX. In addition, solenoid valve installation and maintenance sheets should provide pneumatic specification and fitting details as well as spares information. ■

**About the author**

Jamie Dummer is the managing director of RGS Electro-Pneumatics Ltd, Oswaldtwistle, United Kingdom. After studying engineering at Durham and Cambridge Universities in the UK he started a five year career with Shell, initially in Australia, then moving to Shell UK. Jamie joined the Parmeko group in 1997 and became managing director of RGS in 1999.

