



# Therco expands in nuclear

Heat exchanger specialist Therco is expanding into the nuclear sector with support from the Civil Nuclear Sharing in Growth programme.

Therco produces air-cooled and tubular heat exchangers at its seven-acre site in Sheffield. Its products range from small industrial cooling products, through to large process heat exchangers and condensers of up to 14 metres length and 100 tonnes weight.

**"We started the company in 2004 on the back of increased demand and reducing quality supply, mainly in the UK,"** says Rob Sawtell, Therco managing director. **"We had some good successes early on, and quickly established ourselves as a major supplier to the oil and gas industry."**

Early growth was bolstered by the acquisition of Serck Industrial, a long-established Midlands-based heat exchanger manufacturer with an extensive global aftermarket. Within five years, Therco reached a turnover of £10 million – but the volatility of the core oil and gas market meant that consistent growth from that sector was far from certain.

**"We saw nuclear as one market that would help plug some gaps,"** says Sawtell. **"Around the time that the UK government announced their intention to build some new nuclear power stations, we decided that was something we should explore."**

Sawtell's team started building a relationship with Rolls-Royce's power generation business in 2012, and was soon introduced to the CNSIG programme.

**"We were the first company to have our investment proposal unanimously accepted by the CNSIG board, which was good – it meant we could start aligning ourselves very quickly,"** recalls John Brooks, Therco finance director. **"We knew from day one that to get deeper into the nuclear market, there'd be a fairly steep learning curve to go through."**

The first phase of Therco's CNSIG journey involved a painstaking diagnosis of the business. **"We found a few ugly babies, and the process highlighted some areas of operational weakness which couldn't be ignored for the nuclear journey,"** Sawtell says.

The scope of the programme is illustrated by the performance wall in Therco's offices, outlining the responsibilities and achievements of the key managers who are driving improvements across the business. The senior team meet once a month to review progress, set new targets, and maintain the programme's momentum.

Making sure that every member of Therco's workforce was on board with the programme was an early priority. **"The CNSIG team helped us launch the programme properly – we had a big launch event and that got wind in its sails early on,"** Sawtell says. **"It's been really well embraced. People see that the business needs to reduce its reliance on certain markets, and this is about unlocking a good future in nuclear."**



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In Therco’s machining and fabrication workshops, the continual improvement programme is driven by the prominent SQCDP boards detailing performance and issues in safety, quality, completion, delivery and people.

In the machine shop, on-time delivery rates have improved by 88 per cent in 12 months by embedding best practice.

Succeeding in the nuclear sector is as much about people as about technology, and Sawtell says that CNSIG has delivered tangible benefits in developing suitably qualified and experienced personnel (SQEP). **“People have a new energy and new enthusiasm about them,”** he says. **“We have more SQEP in the business now, and it’s created a good strong questioning culture.”**

Therco now has work in progress for EDF Energy’s current nuclear fleet, is in intense prequalification activity for the decommissioning sector, and has live bids for new build.

Under its 2020 Vision, Therco is targeting a tripling of revenue by 2020, with nuclear making up 30–40 per cent of turnover. To support the growth, the company has secured land and planning permission for a new factory and office block alongside its current facility, doubling its manufacturing capacity to over 9,000m<sup>2</sup>.

As well as domestic and export growth in nuclear, Therco continues to target overseas markets for its oil and gas work.

The team all agree that their CNSIG journey has helped enhance the company’s ability to take advantage of the eventual recovery of that market.

Anyone considering a move into the nuclear market needs to commit significant effort and time, Sawtell emphasises.

**“You will need enormous amounts of patience, tenacity and determination, and there’s no substitute for networking and talking to people who’ve been through the pain,”** he concludes. **“The support you can get down at the Nuclear AMRC on things like Fit For Nuclear and CNSIG is absolutely invaluable. If you don’t know much about the market, don’t kid yourself – you can’t do it alone.”**

[thercohtx.com](http://thercohtx.com)  
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The Civil Nuclear Sharing in Growth (CNSIG) programme aims to develop the UK manufacturing supply chain for civil nuclear new build, operations and decommissioning. It includes a four-year programme of high-intensity support for 10 key suppliers.

The programme is part-funded by government through the Regional Growth Fund, and supported by industry leaders including Rolls-Royce.

Find out more: [namrc.co.uk/services/sig](http://namrc.co.uk/services/sig)



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