

Lassing Dikken confident its products will help it weather economic downturn

The dry bulk material handling industry has had a very busy few years, as anyone involved can attest to. The economic downturn in the past few months has caused a slowdown, but many projects are carrying over from earlier, and there are some new projects in the works, although much fewer than a year ago.

Mining has been a big part of the recent activity. High metal prices meant that new mines were being developed at a record pace throughout 2008. Mines often require belt conveyors in the mine itself, in the processing plant, at the stockpile facility and at the shipping terminal.

Iron ore has been in the news as many new iron ore mines were being developed, and existing mines expanded production. For a while it seemed that there was no limit to the demand for iron ore or the price that could be obtained. Lassing Dikken has been involved in several new developments, in North and South America.

The company was involved in the bankable feasibility study for a new ore iron mine on Baffin Island in northern Canada, and is currently heavily involved in engineering and procurement for a new mine for Consolidated Thompson Iron Mines Limited.

The material handling aspects include a stockpiling and rail loading facility at the mine site in northern Quebec, and a rail unloading, stockpiling and shipping facility near Sept-Iles Quebec. The first ore shipment is planned for the late fall (autumn) of this year.

Coal is another product that has seen a lot of recent activity. Increasing demand in Asia has resulted in new mining activity around the world including Canada and the western United States. At the same time, there has been a big demand for new or upgraded power plants in the United States, both to meet the increasing demands for electricity, and to install pollution control measures. Many plant upgrades require conveyors to handle the increased coal consumption while other conveyors bring limestone into the plant, and others handle synthetic gypsum that is a by-product of the desulphurization process. Lassing Dikken has been involved in numerous projects handling coal, limestone and gypsum over the past several years.

Another area of recent activity is projects for handling petroleum coke. More of the oil found today, especially in the oil sands of northern Canada is heavy crude. In order to refine



Limestone stacker recently installed as part of a plant upgrade at a coal fired generating station in the US.

this into the lighter products needed for gasoline and aviation fuel, the heavier components are left behind in the form of petroleum coke (petcoke). There is a market for petcoke as a fuel, but the market is usually outside North America. This creates a demand for storage and shipping terminals. There have been many petcoke terminals on the US Gulf coast in recent years, and others are being planned as more heavy oil enters the refinery process.

Of course shipping terminals often handle a variety of products, which can put additional demands on equipment manufacturers. Lassing Dikken was recently involved in a shipping terminal that was designed to handle both iron ore and petcoke. The material handling system including the stacker, bucketwheel reclaimer, conveyors and shiploader had to be designed to handle both these materials. The ratio of densities between iron ore and pet coke was 6 to 1, which presented some interesting challenges to the equipment designer. The system had to run fully loaded when handling coke, but the system design had to ensure the volume of material loaded onto the belt was much smaller when handling ore.

The bulk material handling industry, like the economy in general, is much less busy than it was six months ago. There are still some new projects around, but it is very much a buyer's market at the moment. Lassing Dikken is cautiously optimistic that the downturn can be weathered and there will be an increase in activity before too long.



Petcoke shipping terminal in California.