



*ADB SAFEGATE's new solutions offer greater sustainability for operators through 'smarter' power consumption. DPS and APS alternative power technologies – such as in use here at Belgium's Charleroi Airport – have proven to save more than 95% on energy consumption versus halogen and more than 60% compared to traditional LED solutions in use on airfields today*

# Keeping the lights on

Some airfield ground lighting (AGL) projects have gone ahead as planned despite the downturn in the aviation industry and the many social distancing requirements of the pandemic, and the market is not perhaps as depressed for those companies that supply airfield lamps, fittings and other ancillary equipment as might be expected

**A**DB SAFEGATE is very much a leading player in AGL provision and system installation, with airfield lighting being an important component of its overall product mix. The company's integrated solutions for the airfield, gate, tower and terminal offer to "raise efficiency, improve safety, boost environmental sustainability and reduce operational costs" for both airports and airlines.

Products across its wide-ranging portfolio are designed to "loosen operational bottlenecks" that exist anywhere from "aircraft approach to departure".

Joe Pokoj was appointed ADB SAFEGATE's global chief operating officer (COO) and executive vice president (airfield) in September (he also retained his previous role of CEO Americas). As the company's COO, Pokoj oversees ADB SAFEGATE's operations in terms of production, supply chain and quality assurance.

Talking to *Airside* soon after his appointment, Pokoj explained that there had been significant developments at the company in the months leading up to that point, based primarily on changes introduced by Laurent Dubois, who took over as CEO in spring 2020.

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Dubois set in motion a restructuring of the business, putting focus on responsibility across all areas of the company, Pokoj explains. He introduced a new senior leadership team that is based on six sales regions alongside a number of different business lines (such as ‘gate’ and ‘airfield’) and company functions (such as finance and human resources).

“It’s all about accountability and responsibility,” Pokoj says. Moreover, the new corporate structure has stimulated greater co-operation and collaboration across the different areas of the company, he believes.

Pokoj’s colleague, Regardt Willer, head of ADB SAFEGATE’s airfield business line, adds that the new organisational structure has also enabled the company to focus on its core areas of business and its core competencies.

### Weathering the storm

The last 18 months have been all about



“weathering the storm”, says Pokoj. And ADB SAFEGATE has done just that, he advises, its position as a market leader helping it to manage the straitened circumstances in which the aviation industry has found itself during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indeed, Pokoj says, ADB SAFEGATE has not “lost any ground” during the pandemic, but rather has “broken into new areas”. Some markets have performed surprisingly well, he notes, the company having seen

growth in Asia, while Pokoj has also been “pleasantly surprised” by how the North American market has maintained its vivacity over the last year and a half.

AGL projects have also continued in Latin America, such as the big infrastructure upgrade at Peru’s Lima International Airport in which ADB SAFEGATE has played an important role.

Plus, ADB SAFEGATE was also awarded a part in the Dublin Airport North Runway Project in early 2020 for supply and commissioning works across the full airfield product range for the airport’s new runway and all associated new taxiways. Three months into the project, the Covid-19 pandemic struck, but ADB SAFEGATE was able to fulfil all the aspects of the work for which it is responsible completely successfully – with everything delivered and installed on schedule – and the whole package is on track for full handover in early 2022.

In the Middle East, the company has

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**ADB SAFEGATE**



*Hard at work at the ADB SAFEGATE facility in Tianjin*

put its focus on services and delivering the highest level of support to airports during the pandemic, such as offering a full suite of AGL maintenance services to long-time partner Abu Dhabi Airports Company (ADAC) and other customers in the region.

The downturn in the aviation industry has also represented a period in which the company could once again fully focus on what is most important, says Pokoj – its customers. In fact, it has actually brought the company closer to many of its customers.

Willer adds that ADB SAFEGATE quickly adapted to new ways of working. This has included providing support and training to customers remotely when face-to-face communication has not been possible. While personal interaction remains the preferred option whenever possible, there is likely to be a balance to be found between that and remote communication in any new industry ‘normal’, he suggests.

Willer also notes that challenges faced by airport operators could open up new perspectives for ADB SAFEGATE as airport authorities look to outsource functions – perhaps AGL maintenance and the like – in order to minimise their

own ongoing fixed costs.

### Priorities

Pokoj’s own priorities over recent times have lain in four areas, he informs.

The first of these has been the development of an entirely new manufacturing plant in Tianjin, China, that is now up and running.

Secondly, ADB SAFEGATE is about to break ground on a state-of-the-art facility in Columbus, Ohio, in the US. The site is going to triple in size from its current footprint and will also include a new innovation and training centre. It will have a new “campus-type feel”, Pokoj suggests.

The new Tianjin and Columbus plants will represent a significant expansion in manufacturing capacity, grow the company’s systems support capability and enable it to exploit “new opportunities in the Chinese and US markets”, he says.

They will also support ADB SAFEGATE’s acquisition strategy, which in early October saw the firm acquire Protec Automation GmbH, a company specialising in airfield lighting control systems, power technologies and services in the field of industrial automation.

The deal was closed in Mannheim,

Germany, on 30 September, though the official announcement was made in Eckental, Germany, on 4 October.

The acquisition process first began with the two companies partnering with key customers, and – says ADB SAFEGATE – it quickly became evident that aligning formally “made sense for our customers”.

The third strategic priority Pokoj points to is the plan for ADB SAFEGATE to strengthen its supply chain. He wants to see the company and its suppliers act as genuine partners, working closely together for mutual benefit.

Finally, innovation, both in terms of products and operational processes, is going to be key to the future of the industry – and to a smooth recovery of the sector – as well as to ADB SAFEGATE’s own business success, he believes. This will be seen in many aspects of operations, not least in terms of greater automation and optimised use of resources in the business’s manufacturing processes as it prepares for future growth.

The innovation centre at Columbus will help in this regard. A similar centre will be located in Brussels.

New products will be another example of ADB SAFEGATE’s emphasis on innovation. A new range of inset lights is just about to be launched, for example, the light source benefiting from state-of-the-art monitoring and control technology within the company’s LINC 360® communications system designed for optimising performance within an airfield lighting control and monitoring system (ALCMS).

“We’re offering smarter assets for improved remote control and monitoring,” says Willer, who also notes that ADB SAFEGATE’s new solutions offer greater sustainability for operators through ‘smarter’ power consumption. In this regard, ADB SAFEGATE is building on its success with greener products that it has introduced at locations such as Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG) and Amsterdam Airport Schiphol.

For instance, it has worked with its airport operator partner at the key European air hub of CDG on upgrading and re-using AGL infrastructure and equipment rather than replacing older equipment as

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*An artist's impression of the planned ADB SAFEGATE Columbus site in Ohio*

part of an airfield lighting upgrade there. This greener option – a ‘circular economy’ of re-using and upgrading rather than replacing – offers significant environmental benefits, Willer notes.

**The future is bright**

Looking forward, Pokoj believes the coming months will see the Asian and American (both North and South) markets perform comparatively well, although the European market may remain relatively subdued and the Middle East could stay pretty much as it is.

One possible reason for the Europe aviation industry’s slower recovery from the pandemic is its comparatively small domestic aviation market, Willer opines. What he does not doubt is that airports will continue their efforts to move away from halogen to LED lighting on the airfield. In fact, there is not really even a discussion about this anymore, he suggests: “Halogen is very much in the rear view mirror now.”

Airport operators that might not be quite up to speed on this trend might suffer in the future, as spare parts and support mechanisms for halogen lamps become scarcer, Willer observes.

Alongside this is the continued progression as AGL systems become

‘smarter’: maximising the value of such systems through sophisticated monitoring and control capabilities providing data that can also be fed to other elements of airport management such as maintenance and repair teams.

ADB SAFEGATE is planning an innovation event late next year, which will bring customers as well as company executives together.

**Three-pronged approach**

Keith Spicer is managing director of three partner companies engaged in the provision of AGL systems. One is International Airport Visual & Navigational Aids (IAVNA), the second is Airfield Lighting Systems (ALS) and the third is Parkinson Richmark. All three are based at Wickford in Essex, UK, and each has its own role to play in supporting civilian and military airports’ and airfields’ aeronautical ground lighting systems.

IAVNA is one of the world’s largest stockists of AGL equipment, offering both its own and other leading brands. The company was established in 1979 by Spicer’s father, Roy, who had identified a gap in the market for readily available lighting and navigation spares.

Keith’s father retired about 15 years ago

and since then the company has continued to grow (although today it no longer supplies navigational aids). Its portfolio encompasses transformers, cables and connectors, constant current regulators (CCRs), lamps and lamp fittings, portable lighting options, beacons and calibration devices.

Following the acquisition of a failing company that produced equipment such as airport signage and specialised AGL components, including transformers, ALS was formed in 2008 to carry on that company’s work as the latter struggled. Its production capacity was moved to Wickford and everything was brought under one roof there.

The Wickford plant now primarily manufactures signage and CCRs for sale in the UK and mainland Europe.

Acquiring the failing company’s manufacturing capacity was “a brave move”, Spicer notes, representing the first time that the family had actually branched out into manufacturing – whereas IAVNA had only stocked other manufacturers’ brands.

The third company under Spicer’s leadership, Parkinson Richmark, specialises in the design and supply of airside safety products for both commercial and military airports. It is perhaps best known for its reflective markers used on the centrelines and edges of runways and taxiways, as well as on other areas of an apron, but it also offers marshalling equipment, windsocks and masts, wheel chocks and even high-visibility clothing. Richmark’s assets were acquired in 2019 but not its share capital; full acquisition of the company was completed in April this year.

These three companies serve a global market, including civilian gateways such as Dubai International (operated by Dubai Airports) and Manchester Airport Group (MAG), military airports such as Royal Air Force (RAF) stations in the UK and also the big AGL system contractors, many of them very well known.

Spicer’s companies do not get involved in system installation or integration as such, except at smaller gateways; instead, they support the big contractors that are asked to undertake these big projects.

Demand has held up pretty well despite

the Covid-19 pandemic, Spicer asserts. Indeed, ALS has added six new agents this year and the plan is to diversify into the control system market in the near future through a joint venture with a company which has many years of experience in its local market but not in Europe.

Business travel has been impacted by the pandemic, of course, affecting involvement in the industry shows that have also suffered from Covid-related fears as well as other regular business, but the projects in which ALS was involved prior to the pandemic have largely continued unabated. A recently completed project (finished in August this year) involved the installation of new LED lighting at the RAF's Odiham base; another recently finished involved the upgrade of AGL at RAF Brize Norton.

#### AGL projects for military and civilian gateways

Spicer suggests that military infrastructure development projects have generally

continued relatively unaffected compared to similar planned programmes in the civilian sector. However, civilian AGL projects have still gone ahead. For example, Newquay Airport in the southwest of England upgraded its taxiway lights to ones provided by Spicer's teams in preparation for the recent G7 Summit and the arrival of the US president's Air Force One aircraft.

Meanwhile, ALS has continued to develop its product offering during the last couple of years. For example, a new airlight inset light lifting tool designed for quickly and safely removing a light fitting is now available within the ALS portfolio. Embedded lights and fittings can be difficult and time-consuming to remove and the new lifting tool, designed specifically for engineers, makes the job safer and easier, says Spicer.

Different airlight lifting tools are available for different lamp brands and together they represent an "ideal solution" for busy airports needing to test, maintain, repair or replace

any of their ground-fitted lamps, he adds.

Another new product now available, and for which ALS has EU distribution rights, is called SmartBolts. Featuring a visual indication system that turns the head of a bolt from red to black as it is tightened, SmartBolts minimise the danger of foreign object debris (FOD) on an airfield apron caused by bolts working loose and so becoming a potential hazard.

By indicating of when a bolt is not properly tightened and therefore represents a potential safety risk, SmartBolts help airport operators avoid wasting time and money checking and further tightening bolts unnecessarily. They are manufactured in the US and can be retrofitted to existing airfield lighting systems.

A new line in the combined portfolio also now takes in the light fittings of DZS based in Dalian, China. DZS produces high-quality fixtures that, for example, formed part of the afore-mentioned AGL recently installed at RAF Odiham. ■

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