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Observing the Middle East

Prospects for Flow Measurement Applications In a Complex Region

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Over the past six months, I've had the privilege of traveling to the Middle East. I met with some of the companies that supply oil and natural gas to this region, with the aim of better understanding the flow measurement challenges they face. The following provides a few of the more interesting observations I've gleaned during my travels.

1. The standards for instrumentation and control are typically designed for the United States or for Europe and do not, specifically, address the Middle East. For example, the ambient temperature in the Middle East is much higher than in Europe or the United States, and this temperature difference must be accounted for in many applications. As such, some of the companies I met with would like to see instrumentation standards developed for the Middle East.

2. There is no major instrumentation manufacturer in the Middle East. The region has developed very quickly, and while some large international instrumentation suppliers have offices there, no major player in the flowmeter, pressure or temperature space has set up manufacturing operations in the Middle East. As such, some of the companies I met with feel that technical support and delivery times would improve significantly if suppliers were to build manufacturing plants in the Middle East, much like they have in Mexico, China and India.

3. Flowmeter calibration is an issue for many Middle Eastern companies, especially those with ultrasonic flowmeters. There is no accepted international standard to determine how often custody-transfer flowmeters should be recalibrated. As a result, while companies may look for guidance from their suppliers and from other groups, generally they make their own decisions about calibration issues.

4. It is important to evaluate the countries in the Middle East individually, rather than under a single umbrella. The United Arab Emirates, for example, which is home to such technologically advanced cities as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is a very modern country. Qatar, though geographically small, has the third largest natural gas reserves of any country in the world. And its capital, Doha, is a leading business and industrial center.

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, while it is the largest country in the region, is not as modernized as some of its neighbors. Saudi customs are more conservative and more strictly religious than those of its neighbors. As such, getting in and out of Saudi Arabia is more complicated than getting in and out of other countries in the region. Any company evaluating whether to do business in or locate in Saudi Arabia would do well to consider these factors.

5. The growth of industry currently underway in the Middle East figures to drive demand for instrumentation going forward. And while the worldwide economic downturn has slowed growth somewhat, activity figures to pick up again as economies around the world continue to recover.

Currently the instrumentation infrastructure in the Middle East trails other regions of the world, primarily because flow and instrumentation needs have developed so quickly that the region has not had the time to create its own standards or technology base. Going

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forward, look for the Middle East to show rapid development along this line.

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