

# Granite City Ready Mix Reaps

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installed Safety Vision systems on all of their front-end loaders. In addition, camera systems are being methodically introduced to their ready-mix trucks as well. "Currently, we operate about 65 ready-mix trucks," explains Erickson. "I think we have about twenty with cameras right now, and we add more every year." Some trucks are being periodically retrofitted with the systems, but Granite City will automatically spec the systems for every new vehicle purchase they make. "As we turn over our ready-mix trucks, we always make sure the new truck has a rear-vision system installed." Knife River has been extremely supportive of Granite City's investment in rear-vision systems, and encourages their installation on all the sites in their network. And according to Erickson, the other Knife River companies that have already made the investment have communicated the same degree of satisfaction as Granite City. Sappol concurs. "We've worked with Knife River many times. They have been strong supporters of our product, and are working to bring these benefits to all their companies." He added that Knife River has begun to centralize the purchasing decisions for rear-vision systems



In circumstances where mirrors are ineffective, the rear-vision system ensures an accurate situation report for the operator.

to expedite their saturation in the field. Some of the other Knife River companies that have also invested in this technology include Morse Brothers, LTM Inc., Atlas, Inc., JTL Group, KRC Aggregates, Rouge Aggregates, HAP Taylor, Fred Carlson, North Star Materials and Concrete Inc.

Although the systems Granite City are currently using have black-and-white in-cab displays, Safety Vision has recently produced a flat-screen color monitor option as well. Both offer clear, crisp imagery that make viewing easy and effortless. In addition to the standard performance of the systems, Safety Vision has included some extra features and benefits that



The camera, display and control box are the three major components in Safety Vision's rear-vision products.

increase the value and competitiveness of their products. Microphone capability is built into the camera, for example, to give the drivers audio awareness of their surroundings as well. Safety Vision's systems also incorporate infrared into their camera, providing clear imaging for night or low-light conditions.

As with most changes though, the drivers

were hesitant to embrace the new technology. "At first, they were of course a bit skeptical," adds Erickson. "They said 'we already have mirrors and windows, why do we need something like this?' but it didn't take very long at all before they came around. I don't think we have a loader operator or ready-mix truck driver that would run without it now!" Today, the systems have become standard procedure, and are part of the typical daily inspection. "The operators look over the camera system every day now as part of their safety inspection. It has become as routine as checking the brake lights." One benefit Erickson had not anticipated was how the systems would be received by their customers. "Our ready-mix customers really like that they can communicate with the driver now, using the audio capability of the system." He likens a ready-mix site to a little city, especially in residential areas, because there is usually so much human involvement and activity. "A lot of customers now call and ask for the trucks with the rear-vision cameras because they can talk to the driver without having to let go of the chute. Maybe they need to add a little water, or relocate slightly. Now they don't have to stop what they're doing to let the drivers know what they want." Being located in the growth corridor between St. Cloud and the Minneapolis/St. Paul area provides constant demand for their product, regardless of the national economic situation. "We always have so much development going on around here, that we pretty much keep it running at capacity," said Erickson. Most of Granite City's demand is commercial work, pouring foundations for buildings, hospitals and other community infrastructure work; but the local residential development creates demand for them as well. Occasionally, they even win a state contract; most recently, the pouring of four large bridge decks on the new highway 371 project. This wide range of demand keeps Granite City on the constant lookout for new opportunities. "We hope to add another location soon," Erickson elaborates. "We always keep our eyes open for the potential to expand." Working in aggregate production and other related industries will always involve some level of risk; accidents in the field will never be completely eliminated. But as new technologies make it possible to develop products and systems that can further reduce that risk, companies will be able to continue decreasing the number of accidents that do happen, and perhaps lessen the severity of their impact. Today, it is rear-vision monitoring systems that are the latest advancement to benefit the industry; but tomorrow, there is sure to be something new.

## Safety Vision Products Raise Industry Standard

by Mark Scheer

Founded by Bruce Smith and first launched as a distributor for Clarion Rear Vision Camera Equipment, Safety Vision began manufacturing their own products three years ago and have been on a non-stop growth curve ever since.

Headquartered in Houston, Texas, Safety Vision now employs 80 people in five offices, all of whom are focused on producing and distributing industrial-grade mobile camera systems to a wide range of industries. Steve Sappol, national sales manager for Safety Vision, emphasizes their strategic goal of doing one thing and doing it well. "We focus on our expertise, and work to continue perfecting it, rather than being overextended on many products."

The one area where Safety Vision does not keep a narrow focus is the potential industries that can benefit from their products. "We're putting our systems on haul trucks and loaders and ready-mix trucks. Anything big that moves, really!" he adds. Variations of Safety Vision's products have also been applied to industries as diverse as police and fire, waste handling, mining, even mass-transit systems and school buses.

Safety Vision's systems are all comprised of three, main components. A rugged, industrial-grade camera for mounting on a vehicle, a 1" thick flat-panel LCD display, and a connection cable to tie the camera to the monitor. This simplified design makes the system easy to install, and eliminates unnecessary complications. To increase the functionality of the system, additional capabilities can then be added, such as their analog and digital recorders, for industries that can benefit from such features. Police, fire, transit and school bus applications for example, can record on-board activity for safety reasons, to verify insurance claims or even to enhance driver training. The

systems also have a built-in microphone in the camera, to allow workers around the vehicle to effectively communicate with the driver.

To create such a compact system, and to increase the durability of their products, Safety Vision has employed surface-mount technology to miniaturize all the necessary electronics. Surface-mount construction can also reduce the amount of heat build up, a by-product of electronics that can shorten the life of products. "All the components in the camera and monitor are soldered directly to the circuit boards," explains Sappol. "That way, there are no loose wires and large tubes that can come loose or break." Additional durability is gained through the use of sealed O-ring connectors to prevent moisture from entering the system. As a result of these efforts, Safety Vision's products have been ranked the most durable in the industry. "Our camera has a shock rating of 10G's. No one else has been able to achieve that," adds Sappol. "These things are almost bullet proof." The field of view delivered by the Safety Vision camera far exceeds that which can be seen simply from mirrors, providing the driver with visual awareness of the entire space behind the vehicle, as well as a lane on each side. With the image displayed on either a black-and-white or color monitor, drivers can get a clear picture of their surroundings, even in bright sunlight. Infrared imaging is also part of the system, increasing the visual clarity of the system in low-light and night conditions. These advances in display has enabled Safety Vision to earn the highest lux rating in the industry too.

With thousands of installations across the country in the mining, construction and ready mix industries already, demand for their mobile camera systems continues to increase. Because liability reduction is at the forefront of many of these companies, Sappol projects

sales to these industries alone will exceed 10,000 units per year.

"As the price keeps coming down, more companies are beginning to evaluate their potential. We offer pilot programs to help demonstrate the value these systems really do provide, because we know that the results of the product will speak for themselves." Sappol continues. "Companies are saving a lot of money and limiting their liability exposure big time. We witnessed one company, who endured seventeen backing accidents in one year, improve their performance to where they had only two additional accidents in the next three years after installing our systems. Now, the large refuse companies just won't even let a truck leave their yard without a camera installed."

This success has led Safety Vision to be recognized in the Inc. 500 as one of the fastest growing companies in the United States, and to be a four-time recipient of the Houston 100. But with all their success as a business, Safety Vision has not failed in their role in the community, or as an employer either. Ranked the 2nd best place to work in Houston, they have always been mindful of new ways to create a positive working environment. And most recently, with the impact of Hurricane Katrina and the role Houston has played in the recovery, Safety Vision has really risen to the occasion. Bruce Smith immediately established the corporate headquarters as a staging point for distributing supplies to the Red Cross, and has committed to double match any cash contribution made by Safety Vision employees. This level of corporate responsibility to employees and the community, coupled with such tireless commitment to being a customer-driven company, demonstrates why Safety Vision's future is clearly secure.