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Spotlight

By Audrey Leon

Newpark Drilling Fluid's new North American leader focused on domestic growth

In October, Newpark Drilling Fluids named Phil Vollands president of North America. Vollands is focused on growing the business and positioning Newpark Drilling Fluids as the leader in water-based fluid technology.

Vollands has plenty of industry experience. Before coming to Newpark, Vollands spent several years at Weatherford and over a decade with Varco (now National Oilwell Varco), moving to the US in 1996. He served as Varco's vice president of marketing and strategic planning. Prior to his stint with Varco, he worked as a wireline logging engineer in Canada and the North Sea after graduating from Oxford, where he received a BA and an MA in engineering science.

The job at Newpark Drilling Fluids appealed to Vollands for several reasons, he explains.

"I was looking for a company that had a strong sense of mission, and in Newpark Drilling Fluids, I found a company that was committed to driving technological change in an environmentally-friendly way," Vollands says. "Newpark Drilling Fluids is a pure play. We live and die by how well we perform. That has fostered a performance-oriented culture."

"We're a growing company. We can be strategic about where we focus and apply resources to gain market share."

Phil Vollands



Vollands is particularly proud of the technology center Newpark Drilling Fluids opened in 2013. The Newpark Technology Center – located on an 11-acre tract of land in Katy, Texas – spans 102,685sq ft, of which 37,000sq ft is devoted to research and development space.

The facility comes equipped with a field testing and services lab, designed to optimize formulations during operations. The facility is also home to the Downhole Simulation Cell, a drilling simulator that replicates downhole conditions.

"The Newpark Technology Center is second to none in the area of drilling fluids," Vollands says. "We have multiple labs, and enormous capabilities in terms of what we can do. We can give specific, tailor-made drilling fluid programs on the basis of customer input, through samples

and cuttings."

"It's a great training facility. We have customers come through there," he says.

In his new role Vollands has several goals in mind. One is to continue to focus on its high-performance, water-based fluids line called the Evolution system.

"High-performance, water-based technology is taking off in all areas of North America," he says. "The Evolution System saw a quarter-on-quarter increase of 34% in 1Q 2014. We're drilling faster and further."

Vollands continued, saying: "It's all about improved performance, but it is also about doing what makes sense for the environment, rather than using diesel-based fluids, the old technology."

Domestic growth is also on Vollands' long-term agenda, he explained, saying: "We're a growing company. We can be strategic about where we focus and apply resources to gain market share."

And Newpark Drilling Fluids is definitely looking to grow its market share in the Gulf of Mexico.

Newpark's product line also includes synthetic drilling fluids, which Vollands called a standard in the Gulf of Mexico. "It will be interesting to see what happens in the future there," he says. "There's certain advantages to water-based fluids including how they handle gas, the thermo properties and the lack of compressibility."

And indeed, Vollands believes that his company has plenty of room for future development. "I came from Varco where the top drive was deemed a huge breakthrough. PDC Bits, a huge breakthrough. Automation, a huge breakthrough. Why wouldn't we think that through focused application of technology that drilling fluids wouldn't offer another major breakthrough? I think we're starting to see that." **OE**



The Newpark Technology Center. Photo from Newpark Drilling Fluids.