

Heading:

Mitsui Chemicals' Ichihara Works Reduces Costs by Optimizing their Boilers and Turbines

Translation:

Mitsui Chemicals' Ichihara Works (in Ichihara City, Chiba Prefecture) has reduced costs by using a computer system to optimize the operation of their boiler/turbines which supply steam and power. AspenTech Japan (Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, President Kenichi Matsumoto, 03-3262-1710) introduced a system that optimizes plant operations, and operational control is automated to maximize efficiency according to the forecast steam power required. As focus grows on the decrease in the competitiveness of domestic petrochemical plants due to the strong yen and higher raw material and fuel costs, this allows them to realize cost savings worth billions of yen per year.

Ichihara Works has 7 boilers and 11 turbines with a generating capacity of approximately 200,000 kW. The fall 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers and the resulting deteriorated economic conditions which influenced the petrochemical industry was the trigger for the introduction of the operational optimization system.

To optimize operations it is necessary to select which individual boilers and turbines to run in order to meet steam and power demand. At Ichihara Works they used to have employees choose the best operation pattern from a pattern list, but Utility Director Akira Kawamura states that "Steam power demand is constantly changing. There is a limit to the human ability to optimize operating efficiency by responding to these changes."

Therefore in April 2009 Ichihara Works started consultations with AspenTech Japan on installing "Aspen Utility Planner" to optimize boiler/turbine operations. The system began operating in October 2010.

Optimization systems automatically calculate the optimal cost balance for boiler and turbine operations based on the demand forecasting system for steam and electricity. The results are then on the central control room monitor by the operating personnel. Once they confirm that there are no issues they reflect the changes in the operations.

As a result of the optimization and load balancing of each part, fuel injected into the boilers was reduced 1%, and operating cost reductions of 0.5% for the turbines. In addition to also reducing workload on operating personnel, "half of the operating personnel are young, in their 20s. We now have a new technical tradition to hold a meeting where we review the optimization results among the operating personnel" states Mr. Kawamura. Future plans include additional advancements toward improving the system's operational optimization.

AspenTech Japan's parent company, Aspen Technology (Massachusetts) has a 39.2% share of the world's optimization systems for process industries such as petroleum refining and petrochemicals. Their focus for the future is on developing systems that support cloud computing and smart phones (feature phones) to provide optimization systems over data communications networks, and to grow their install base among domestic process industries.