



Investor Update
February 2006 Business Trends Report

March 21, 2006

FEBRUARY BUSINESS TRENDS VERSUS PRIOR YEAR	
CONSOLIDATED SALES +10% Consolidated sales increased +10% YOY for the month of February, continuing the trend of strong underlying growth in all end markets. Currency effects offset by days and prior year equipment sales. Sequential sales trends continued at January's rate; YOY comparison is against strong prior year February.	
NORTH AMERICA Sales +9% YOY. Sales growth came from strong pricing comparisons and higher merchant volumes YOY. LOX, LIN and LAR volumes showed solid growth versus January. Strong oil well services activity. On-site volumes grew versus January, but were below prior year due to customer outage. Strong results in Canada and Mexico. Packaged gas same store sales continued to show strong YOY growth in both gases and hardgoods.	EUROPE Sales -4% YOY. Excluding currency effects, underlying sales were +3%, primarily due to higher pricing. Overall volumes unchanged as a customer turnaround offset modest volume growth in most markets.
SOUTH AMERICA Sales +23% YOY, +7% ex-currency due to strong YOY pricing comparisons in merchant and packaged gases. Volume comparisons lower sequentially due to customer maintenance shutdowns and days. Solid growth in packaged gases.	ASIA Sales +27% YOY due to strong volume growth. Electronic sales up 37% YOY due to strong sales of sputtering targets, and strong growth in gases sales, particularly in Korea, and Taiwan.
PST Sales +10%, and +13% ex-currency. Continued strong demand for OEM aviation coatings and higher volumes of thermal spray powders. Aviation repair business picking up.	

The information provided in this report reflects one month's business activity (except where noted otherwise) and does not necessarily reflect longer-term business trends or suggest financial results for the current quarter or for future reporting periods. Unless specified, trends are not adjusted for differing numbers of sales days. The monthly sales data is unaudited.

This document contains "forward-looking statements" within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements are based on management's reasonable expectations and assumptions as of the date the statements are made, but involve risks and uncertainties. These risks and uncertainties include, without limitation: the performance of stock markets generally; developments in worldwide and national economies; the cost and availability of electric power, natural gas and other raw materials; the ability to achieve price increases to offset cost increases; the degree of inflation in wages and other compensation; the ability to attain expected operational efficiencies; changes in foreign currencies and interest rates; continued timely development and market acceptance of new products and applications; the impact of competitive products and pricing; the impact of changes in financial accounting standards; the impact of tax and other legislation and government regulation in jurisdictions in which the company operates; the cost and outcomes of litigation; future financial and operating performance of major customers and industries served; and the effectiveness and speed of integrating new acquisitions into the business. These risks and uncertainties may cause actual future results or circumstances to differ materially from the projections or estimates contained in the forward looking statements. The Company assumes no obligation to update or provide revisions to any forward-looking statements in response to changing circumstances.