

CHAPTER 21. PRINTING PLANTS

THIS chapter outlines air-conditioning requirements for key printing operations. Air conditioning of printing plants can provide controlled, uniform air moisture content and temperature in working spaces. Paper, the principal material used in printing, is hygroscopic and very sensitive to variations in the humidity of the surrounding air. Printing problems caused by paper expansion and contraction can be avoided by controlling the moisture content throughout the manufacture and printing of the paper.

1. DESIGN CRITERIA

The following are three basic printing methods:

- **Relief printing (letterpress).** Ink is applied to a raised surface.
- **Lithography.** Inked surface is neither in relief nor recessed.
- **Gravure (intaglio printing).** Inked areas are recessed below the surface.

[Figure 1](#) shows the general work flow through a printing plant. The operation begins at the publisher and ends with the finished printed product and paper waste. Paper waste, which may be as much as 20% of the total paper used, affects profitability. Proper air conditioning can help reduce the amount of paper wasted.

In sheetfed printing, individual sheets are fed through a press from a stack or load of sheets and collected after printing. In webfed rotary printing, a continuous web of paper is fed through the press from a roll. The printed material is cut, folded, and delivered from the press as signatures, which form the sections of a book.

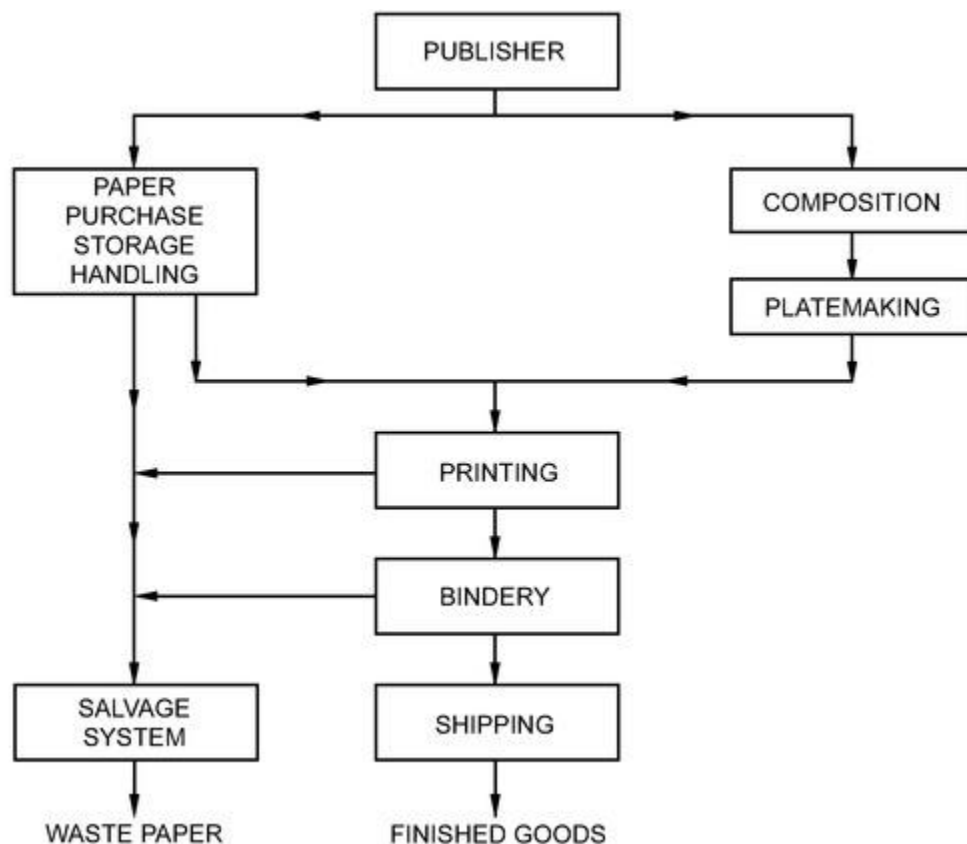


Figure 1. Work Flow Through a Printing Plant

Sheetfed printing is a slow process in which the ink is essentially dry as the sheets are delivered from the press. **Offsetting**, the transference of an image from one sheet to another, is prevented by applying a powder or starch to

separate each sheet as it is delivered from the press. Starches present a housekeeping problem: the particles (30 to 40 μm in size) tend to fly off, eventually settling on any horizontal surface.

If both temperature and relative humidity are maintained within normal human comfort limits, they have little to do with web breaks or the runnability of paper in a webfed press. At extremely low humidity, static electricity causes the paper to cling to the rollers, creating undue stress on the web, particularly with high-speed presses. Static electricity is also a hazard when flammable solvent inks are used.

Special Considerations

Special Warning: Certain industrial spaces may contain flammable, combustible, and/or toxic concentrations of vapors or dusts under either normal or abnormal conditions. In spaces such as these, there are life-safety issues that this chapter may not completely address. Special precautions must be taken in accordance with requirements of recognized authorities such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). In all situations, engineers, designers, and installers who encounter conflicting codes and standards must defer to the code or standard that best addresses and safeguards life safety.

Various areas in printing plants require special attention to processing and heat loads. Engraving and platemaking departments must have very clean air: not as clean as that for industrial cleanrooms, but cleaner than that for offices. Engraving and photographic areas may also have special ventilation needs because of the chemicals used. Nitric acid fumes from powderless etching require careful duct material selection. Composing rooms, which contain computer equipment, can be treated the same as similar office areas. The excessive dust from cutting in the stitching and binding operations must be controlled. Stereotype departments have very high heat loads.

In pressrooms, air distribution must not cause the web to flutter or force contaminants or heat (which normally would be removed by roof vents) down to the occupied level. Air should be introduced immediately above the occupied zone wherever possible to minimize total flow and encourage stratification. High air exchange rates may be required where solvent- or oil-based inks are used, because of the large quantity of organic solvent vapors that may be released from nonpoint sources. Exhaust emissions from dryer systems may contain substantial concentrations of solvent vapors, which must be captured and recovered or incinerated to satisfy local air pollution requirements. Where these measures are required, efforts should be made to maximize point-source capture of vapors to minimize the size, cost, and energy requirements for vapor recovery/incineration equipment. These efforts also minimize the effect of these requirements on general ventilation systems.

Conventional air-conditioning and air-handling equipment, particularly rooftop equipment, may be unable to handle the high outdoor air requirements of pressroom applications effectively. Stratified ventilation may be used in high-bay installations to reduce total system airflow and air-conditioning requirements. Pressrooms using oil- or solvent-based inks should be provided with a minimum of $2.5 \text{ L}/(\text{s} \cdot \text{m}^2)$ of outdoor air to ensure adequate dilution of internally generated volatile organic compounds. Ventilation of storage areas should be about 0.5 air changes per hour (ach); bindery ventilation should be about 1 ach. Storage areas with materials piled high may need roof-mounted smoke- and heat-venting devices.

In a bindery, loads of loose signatures are stacked near equipment, which makes it difficult to supply air to occupants without scattering the signatures. One solution is to run the main ducts at the ceiling with many supply branches dropped to within 2.5 to 3 m of the floor. Conventional adjustable blow diffusers, often the linear type, are used.

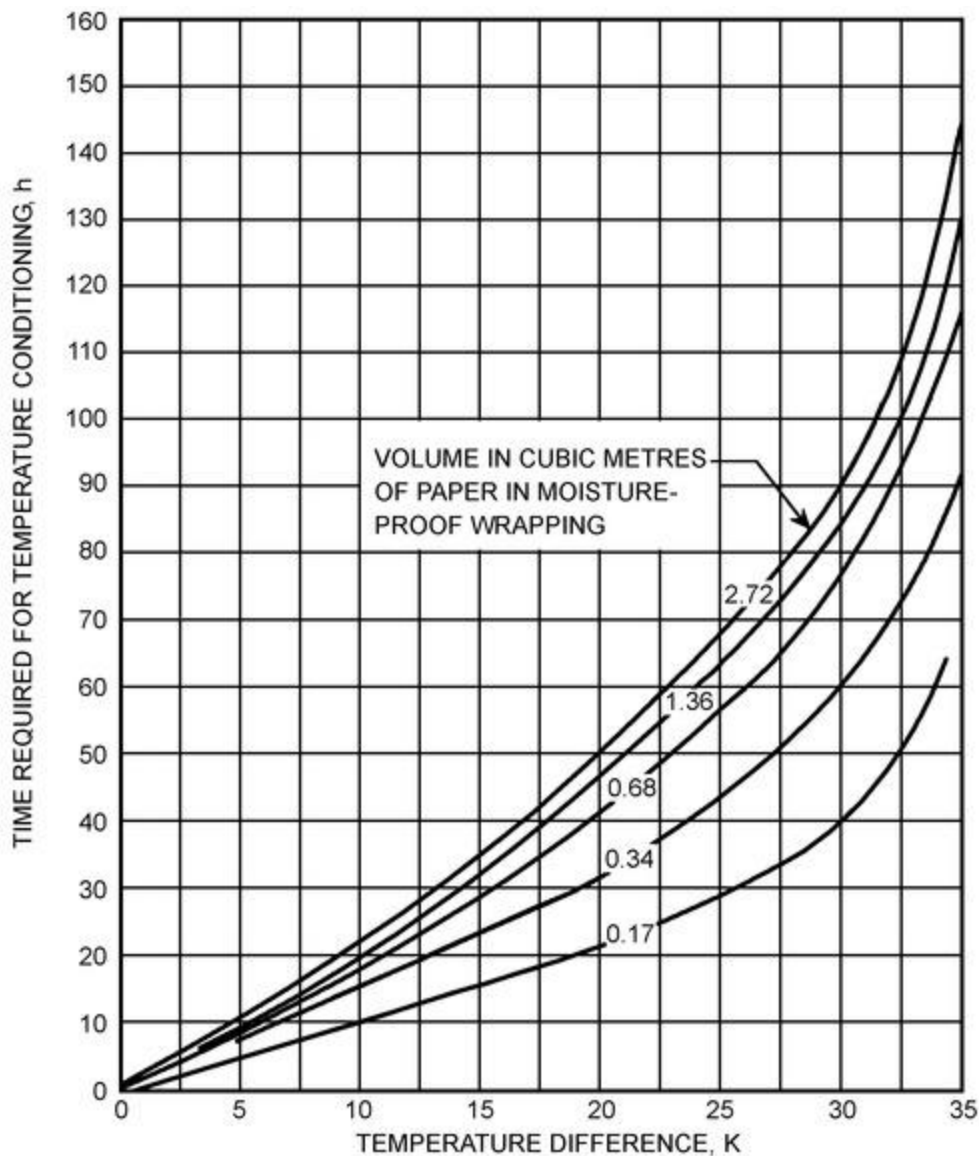


Figure 2. Temperature-Conditioning Chart for Paper

2. CONTROL OF PAPER MOISTURE CONTENT

Controlling the moisture content and temperature of paper is important in all printing, particularly multicolor lithography. Paper should be received at the printing plant in moisture-proof wrappers, which are not broken or removed until the paper is brought to the pressroom temperature. When exposed to room temperature, paper at temperatures substantially below the room temperature rapidly absorbs moisture from the air, causing distortion. [Figure 2](#) shows the time required to temperature-condition wrapped paper. Printers usually order paper with a moisture content approximately in equilibrium with the relative humidity maintained in their pressrooms. Papermakers find it difficult to supply paper in equilibrium with a relative humidity higher than 50%.

Digital hygrometers can be used to check the hygroscopic condition of paper relative to the surrounding air. The probes contain a moisture-sensitive element that measures the electrical conductivity of the paper. Intact mill wrappings and the tightness of the roll normally protect a paper roll for about six months. If the wrapper is damaged, moisture usually penetrates no more than 3 mm.

3. PLATEMAKING

Humidity and temperature control are important considerations when making lithographic and collotype plates, photoengravings, and gravure plates and cylinders. If the moisture content and temperature of the plates increase, the coatings increase in light sensitivity, which necessitates adjustments in the light intensity or the length of exposure to give uniformity.

If platemaking rooms are maintained at constant dry-bulb temperature and relative humidity, plates can be produced at known control conditions. As soon as it is dry, a bichromated colloid coating starts to age and harden at a rate that varies with the atmospheric conditions, so exposures made a few hours apart may be quite different. The rate of aging and hardening can be estimated more accurately when the space is air conditioned. Exposure can then be reduced progressively to maintain uniformity. An optimum relative humidity of 45% or less substantially increases the useful life

of bichromated colloid coatings; the relative humidity control should be within 2%. A dry-bulb temperature of 24 to 27°C maintained within 1 K is good practice. The ventilation air requirements of the plate room should be investigated. A plant with a large production of deep-etch plates should consider locating this operation outside the conditioned area.

Exhausts for platemaking operations consist primarily of lateral or downdraft systems at each operation. Because of their bulkiness or mass, plates or cylinders are generally conveyed by overhead rail to the workstation, where they are lowered into the tank for plating, etching, or grinding. Exhaust ducts must be below or to one side of the working area, so lateral exhausts are generally used for open-surface tanks.

Exhaust quantities vary, depending on the nature of the solution and shape of the tank, but they should provide exhaust in accordance with the recommendations of *Industrial Ventilation* by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH 2016) for a minimum control velocity of 0.25 m/s at the side of the tank opposite the exhaust intake. Tanks should be covered to minimize exhaust air quantities and increase efficiency. Excessive air turbulence above open tanks should be avoided. Because of the nature of the exhaust, ducts should be acid-resistant and liquidtight to prevent moisture condensation.

Webfed offset operations and related departments are similar to webfed letterpress operations, without the heat loads created in the composing room and stereotype departments. Special attention should be given to air cleanliness and ventilation in platemaking to avoid flaws in the plates caused by chemical fumes and dust.

A rotogravure plant can be hazardous because highly volatile solvents are used. Equipment must be explosionproof, and air-handling equipment must be sparkproof. Clean air must be supplied at controlled temperature and relative humidity.

Reclamation or destruction systems are used to prevent photosensitive hydrocarbons from being exhausted into the atmosphere. Some reclamation systems use activated carbon for continuous processing. Incineration or catalytic converters may be used to produce rapid oxidation to eliminate pollutants. The amount of solvents reclaimed may exceed that added to the ink.

4. RELIEF PRINTING

In relief printing (letterpress), rollers apply ink only to the raised surface of a printing plate. Pressure is then applied to transfer the ink from the raised surface directly to the paper. Only the raised surface touches the paper to transfer the desired image.

Air conditioning in newspaper pressrooms and other webfed letterpress printing areas minimizes problems caused by static electricity, ink mist, and expansion or contraction of the paper during printing. A wide range of operating conditions is satisfactory. The temperature should be selected for operator comfort.

At web speeds of 5 to 10 m/s, it is not necessary to control the relative humidity because inks are dried with heat. In some types of printing, moisture is applied to the web, and the web is passed over chill rolls to further set the ink.

Webfed letterpress ink is heat-set, made with high-boiling, slow-evaporating synthetic resins and petroleum oils dissolved or dispersed in a hydrocarbon solvent. The solvent must have a narrow boiling range with a low volatility at room temperatures and a fast evaporating rate at elevated temperatures. The solvent is vaporized in the printing press dryers at temperatures from 120 to 200°C, leaving the resins and oils on the paper. Webfed letterpress inks are dried after all colors are applied to the web.

The inks are dried by passing the web through dryers at speeds of 5 to 10 m/s. There are several types of dryers: open-flame gas cup, flame impingement, high-velocity hot air, and steam drum.

Exhaust quantities through a press dryer vary from about 3300 to 7000 L/s at standard conditions, depending on the type of dryer used and the speed of the press. Exhaust temperatures range from 120 to 200°C.

Solvent-containing exhaust is heated to 700°C in an air pollution control device to incinerate the effluent. A catalyst can be used to reduce the temperature required for combustion to 540°C, but it requires periodic inspection and rejuvenation. Heat recovery reduces the fuel required for incineration and can be used to heat pressroom makeup air.

5. LITHOGRAPHY

Lithography uses a grease-treated printing image receptive to ink, on a surface that is neither raised nor depressed. Both grease and ink repel water. Water is applied to all areas of the plate, except the printing image. Ink is then applied only to the printing image and transferred to the paper in the printing process. In multicolor printing operations, the image may be printed up to four times on the same sheet of paper in different colors. Registration of images is critical to final color quality.

Offset printing transfers the image first to a rubber blanket and then to the paper. Sheetfed and web offset printing are similar to letterpress printing. The inks used are similar to those used in letterpress printing but contain water-resistant vehicles and pigment. In web offset and gravure printing, the relative humidity in the pressroom should be kept constant, and the temperature should be selected for comfort or, at least, to avoid heat stress. It is important to maintain steady conditions to ensure the dimensional stability of the paper onto which the images are printed.

The pressroom for sheet multicolor offset printing has more exacting humidity requirements than other printing processes. The paper must remain flat with constant dimensions during multicolor printing, in which the paper may make six or more passes through the press over a period of a week or more. If the paper does not have the right moisture content at the start, or if there are significant changes in atmospheric humidity during the process, the paper

will not retain its dimensions and flatness, and misregistering will result. In many cases of color printing, a register accuracy of 100 μm is required. [Figure 3](#) shows the close control of the air relative humidity that is necessary to achieve this register accuracy. The data shown in this figure are for composite lithographic paper.

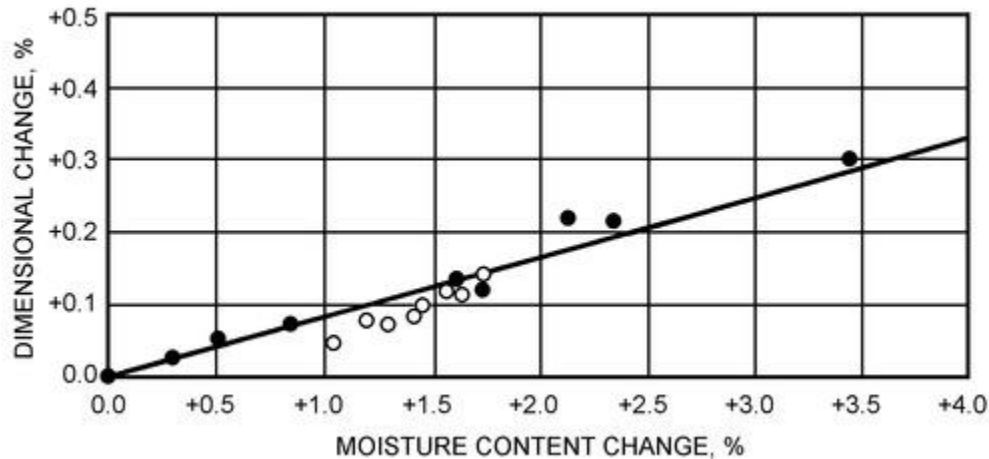


Figure 3. Effects of Variation in Moisture Content on Dimensions of Printing Papers (Weber and Snyder 1934)

Maintaining constant moisture content of the paper is complicated because paper picks up moisture from the moist offset blanket during printing (0.1 to 0.3% for each impression). When two or more printings are made in close register work, the paper at the start of the printing process should have a moisture content in equilibrium with air at 5 to 8% rh above the pressroom air. At this condition, the moisture evaporated from the paper into the air nearly balances the moisture added by the press. In obtaining register, it is important to keep the sheet flat and free from wavy or tight edges. To do this, the relative humidity balance of the paper should be slightly above that of the pressroom atmosphere. This balance is not as critical in four-color roll-feed presses because the press moisture does not penetrate the paper quickly enough between colors to affect sheet dimensions or cause sheet distortion.

Recommended Environment

The Graphic Arts Technical Foundation recommends ideal conditions in a lithographic pressroom of 24 to 27°C db and 43 to 47% rh, controlled to ± 1 K db and $\pm 2\%$ rh (Reed 1970). Comfort and economy of operation influence the choice of temperature. The effect of relative humidity variations on register can be estimated for offset paper from [Figure 3](#). Closer relative humidity control of the pressroom air is required for multicolor printing of 1930 mm sheets than for 560 mm sheets with the same register accuracy. Closer control is needed for multicolor printing, where the sheet makes two or more trips through the press, than for one-color printing.

Ink drying is affected by temperature and humidity, so uniform results are difficult to obtain without controlling the atmospheric conditions. Printing inks must dry rapidly to prevent offsetting and smearing. High relative humidity and high moisture content in paper tend to prevent ink penetration, so more ink remains on the surface than can be quickly oxidized. This affects drying time, intensity of color, and uniformity of ink on the surface. Relative humidity below 60% is favorable for drying at a comfortable temperature. Higher relative humidity may cause severe paper distortion and significant damage to the final product.

The air conditioning for the pressroom of a lithographic plant should control air temperature and relative humidity, filter the air, supply ventilation air, and distribute the air without pronounced drafts around the presses. Using anti-offset sprays to set the ink creates an additional air-filtering load from the pressroom. Drafts and high airflow over the presses lead to excessive drying of the ink and water, which causes scumming or other problems.

The operating procedures of the pressroom should be analyzed to determine the heat removal load. The lighting load is high and constant throughout the day. The temperature of the paper brought into the pressroom and the length of time it is in the room should be considered to determine the sensible load from the paper. [Figure 2](#) shows the time required for wrapped paper to reach room temperature. The press motors usually generate a large portion of the internal sensible heat gain.

Readings should be taken to obtain the running power load of the larger multicolor presses. The moisture content of the paper fed to the press and the relative humidity of the air must be considered when computing the internal latent heat gain. Paper is used that is in equilibrium with air at a relative humidity somewhat higher than that of the pressroom, so the paper gives up moisture to the space as it absorbs moisture during printing. If the moisture transfer is in balance, water used in the printing process should be included in the internal moisture load. It is preferable to determine the water evaporation from the presses by testing.

Air Conditioning

Precise multicolor offset lithography printing requires either refrigeration with provision for separate humidity control, or sorption dehumidifying equipment for independent humidity control with provision for cooling. The need for humidity

control in the pressroom may be determined by calculating the dimensional change of the paper for each percent of change in relative humidity and checking this with the required register for the printing process.

Air conditioning of the photographic department is usually considered secondary in importance to that of the pressroom. Most of the work in offset lithography is done on film. Air conditioning controls cleanliness and comfort and maintains the size of the film for register work.

Air conditioning is important in the stripping department, both for comfort and for maintaining size and register. Curling of the film and flats, as well as shrinkage or stretch of materials, can be minimized by maintaining constant relative humidity. This is particularly important for close-register color work. The photographic area, stripping room, and platemaking area usually are maintained at the same conditions as the pressroom.

Dryers used for web offset printing are the same type as for webfed letterpress. Drying is not as complex because less ink is applied and presses run at lower speeds (4 to 9 m/s).

6. ROTOGRAVURE

Rotogravure printing uses a cylinder with minute inkwells etched in the surface to form the printing image. Ink is applied to the cylinder, filling the wells. Excess ink is then removed from the cylinder surface by doctor blades, leaving only the ink in the wells. The image is then transferred to the paper as it passes between the printing cylinder and an impression cylinder.

In sheetfed gravure printing (as in offset printing), expansion, contraction, and distortion should be prevented to obtain correct register. The paper need not be in equilibrium with air at a relative humidity higher than that of the pressroom, because no moisture is added to the paper in the printing process. Humidity and temperature control should be exacting, like in offset printing. The relative humidity should be 45 to 50%, controlled to within $\pm 2\%$, with a comfort temperature controlled to within ± 1 K.

Gravure printing ink dries principally by evaporating the solvent in the ink, leaving a solid film of pigment and resin. The solvent is a low-boiling hydrocarbon, and evaporation takes place rapidly, even without the use of heat. The solvents have closed-cup flash points from -5 to 27°C and are classified as Group I or special hazard liquids by local code and insurance company standards. As a result, in areas adjacent to gravure press equipment and solvent and ink storage areas, electrical equipment must be Class I, Division 1 or 2, as described by the *National Electrical Code*[®] (NFPA *Standard* 70), and ventilation requirements (both supply and exhaust) are stringent. Ventilation should be designed for high reliability, with sensors to detect unsafe pollutant concentrations and then to initiate alarm or safety shutdown when necessary.

Rotogravure printing units operate in tandem, each superimposing print over that from the preceding unit. Press speeds range from 6 to 12 m/s. Each unit is equipped with its own dryer to prevent subsequent smearing or smudging.

A typical drying system consists of four dryers connected to an exhaust fan. Each dryer is equipped with fans to recirculate 2500 to 4000 L/s (at standard conditions) through a steam or hot water coil and then through jet nozzles. The hot air (55°C) impinges on the web and drives off the solvent-laden vapors from the ink. It is normal to exhaust half of this air. The system should be designed and adjusted to prevent solvent vapor concentration from exceeding 25% of its lower flammable limit (Marsailles 1970). If this is not possible, constant lower-flammable-limit (LFL) monitoring, concentration control, and safety shutdown capability should be included.

In exhaust design for a particular process, solvent vapor should be captured from the printing unit where paper enters and exits the dryer, from the fountain and sump area, and from the printed paper, which continues to release solvent vapor as it passes from one printing unit to another. Details of the process, such as ink and paper characteristics and rate of use, are required to determine exhaust quantities.

When dilution ventilation is used, exhaust of 500 to 700 L/s (at standard conditions) at the floor is often provided between each unit. The makeup air units are adjusted to supply slightly less air to the pressroom than that exhausted, to keep the pressroom negative with respect to the surrounding areas.

7. OTHER PLANT FUNCTIONS

Flexography

Flexography uses rubber raised printing plates and functions much like a letterpress. Flexography is used principally in the packaging industry to print labels and also to print on smooth surfaces, such as plastics and glass.

Collotype Printing

Collotype or photogelatin printing is a sheetfed printing process related to lithography. The printing surface is bichromated gelatin with varying affinity for ink and moisture, depending on the degree of light exposure received. There is no mechanical dampening as in lithography, and the necessary moisture in the gelatin printing surface is maintained by operating the press in an atmosphere of high relative humidity, usually about 85%. Because the tonal values printed are very sensitive to changes in the moisture content of the gelatin, the relative humidity should be maintained within $\pm 2\%$.

Because tonal values are also very sensitive to changes in ink viscosity, temperature must be closely maintained; $27^\circ\text{C} \pm 2$ K is recommended. Collotype presses are usually partitioned off from the main plant, which is kept at a lower relative humidity, and the paper is exposed to high relative humidity only while it is being printed.

Salvage

Salvage systems remove paper trim and shredded paper waste from production areas, and carry airborne shavings to a cyclone or baghouse collector, where they are baled for recycling. Air quantities required are 2.5 to 2.8 m³ per kilogram of paper trim, and the transport velocity in the ductwork is 23 to 25 m/s (Marsailles 1970). Humidification may be provided to prevent the buildup of a static charge and consequent system blockage.

Air Filtration

Ventilation and air-conditioning systems for printing plants commonly use automatic moving-curtain dry-media filters with renewable media having a rating of MERV 13 (ASHRAE *Standard* 52.2).

In sheetfed pressrooms, a high-performance final filter is used to filter starch particles, which require about a MERV 13 rating as well. In film processing areas, which require relatively dust-free conditions, high-efficiency air filters are installed, with a rating of MERV 14.

A different type of filtration problem in printing is **ink mist** or **ink fly**, which is common in newspaper pressrooms and in heatset letterpress or offset pressrooms. Minute droplets of ink (5 to 10 µm) are dispersed by ink rollers rotating in opposite directions. The cloud of ink droplets is electrostatically charged. Suppressors, charged to repel the ink back to the ink roller, are used to control ink mist. Additional control is provided by automatic moving curtain filters.

Binding and Shipping

Some printed materials must be bound. Two methods of binding are perfect binding and stitching. In **perfect binding**, sections of a book (signatures) are gathered, ruffed, glued, and trimmed. The glued edge is flat. Large books are easily bound by this type of binding. Low-pressure compressed air and a vacuum are usually required to operate a perfect binder, and paper shavings are removed by a trimmer. The use of heated glue necessitates an exhaust system if the fumes are toxic.

In **stitching**, sections of a book are collected and stitched (stapled) together. Each signature is opened individually and laid over a moving chain. Careful handling of the paper is important. This has the same basic air requirements as perfect binding.

Mailing areas of a printing plant wrap, label, and ship the manufactured goods. Operation of the wrapper machine can be affected by low humidity. In winter, humidification of the bindery and mailing area to about 40 to 50% rh may be necessary to prevent static buildup.

REFERENCES

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