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## **Make Time for Pre-Season Maintenance**

**By Nathan Oberg**

### **Introduction**

Pre-season maintenance is an important area that is often neglected by growers and storage managers. Although these routine inspections and maintenance are not glamorous, they are a critical step in maximizing your profitability from storage. The first step is a detailed walk-through and critical evaluation each component in the ventilation system. Now is the time to check the function of the control panel, sensors, fans, doors and louvers, and humidification equipment. If something is not working properly now is the best time to have it repaired or replaced. It is crucial that all components of the ventilation system are in working order *before* the first potato is loaded into the storage. Recent research has shown that half of the season-long shrinkage can occur in the first week of storage. This means that any undetected mechanical problems will cost you in shrinkage and tuber quality. Additionally, it is critical that all temperature and relative humidity sensors are functioning accurately. These sensors are the “eyes and ears” of the control system and must be accurate for you to maximize stored potato quality.

### **Airflow**

Pre-harvest preparations are not complete until you verify that you have enough sections of ventilation pipe and that they were not damaged during the previous season. You also need to be sure that you have ordered enough duct-tape to seal each joint. This simple, but frequently overlooked, step will help insure that you have uniform airflow distribution throughout the pile. Sealing joints with duct-tape will minimize hot-spots and help insure good sprout inhibitor distribution. The duct-tape acts just like the

gaskets between sections of irrigation pipe. No one would install hand-line or main-line in a potato field without gaskets. Why would you treat the storage any differently?

### **Upgrades that Pay**

Pre-season service is also the perfect time to upgrade or enhance your ventilation system. Does your current control panel give you state of the art computer control of all functions, including wireless communications, carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitoring and automated variable frequency drive (VFD) fan speed control? If not, why not upgrade to the Gellert Galaxy™ control panel? Is your storage equipped with poorly insulated and outdated fresh-air louvers that limit your ability to accurately maintain the desired temperature and relative humidity? Why not replace them with Gellert ClimaSeal™ fresh-air doors? Inferior equipment will actually cost you money by impacting potato quality and promoting shrinkage. Investing in your storage ventilation system is the most cost effective way to increase the profitability of your entire operation. Upgrades that you make today will put money back in your pocket tomorrow.

### **Schedule Service Today**

Pre-season service is the best way to prepare your storage for the coming season. When problems arise after the storage is full, they will be more costly to deal with and hurt the quality of your potatoes. Two weeks after the storage is full is not the time to discover that you have sensor calibration problems, or that your humidifier is not working properly. Take the time schedule pre-season maintenance and to objectively evaluate your ventilation system and make the changes that will improve stored potato quality and put money back into your pocket. Please contact the Gellert Dealer nearest you to schedule your pre-season inspection.

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