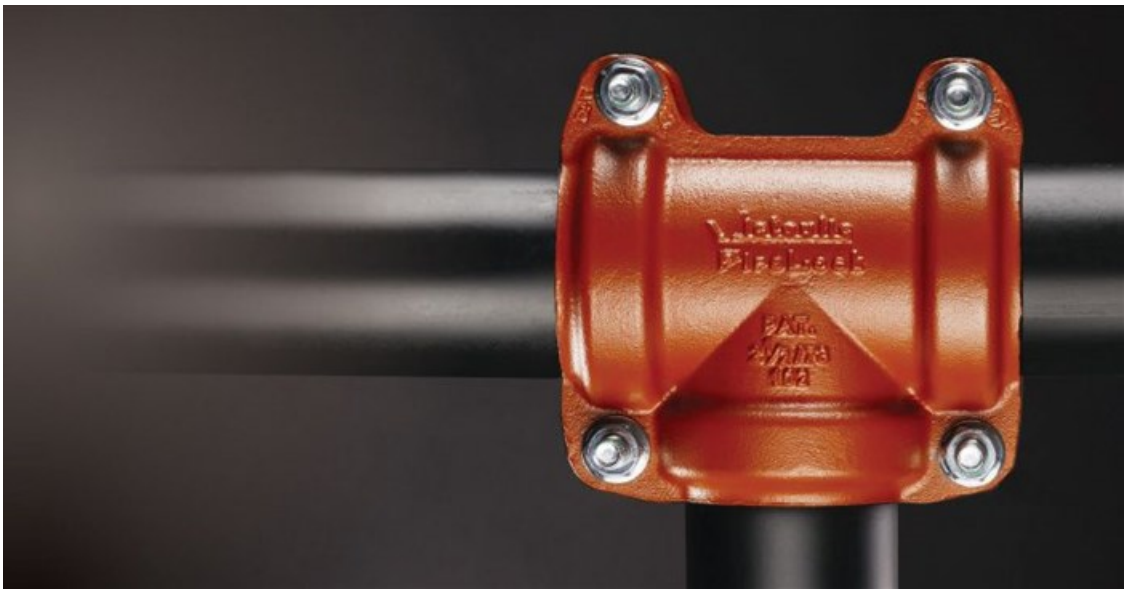
BIZCOMMUNITY

Mechanical pipe joining provides solution to key concerns in struggling construction industry

By Marcel Ley

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The latest *FNB BER Civil Confidence Index*, released towards the end of September, has shown that confidence in South Africa's construction sector in the last quarter fell to its lowest level since 2000. The index registered a level of 15, shedding 13 points from the second quarter. In addition to this lower confidence, caused primarily by weaker growth, Stats SA revealed that job losses in the construction industry over Q2 in 2017 totalled approximately 11,000.



Against the background of these bleak figures, two things are clear – firstly, that reliable yet efficient construction solutions are even more critical in this industry, and secondly, that construction workers need to ensure that they keep up to date with the latest building methods so that they have the most needed skills in a tight job market.

Welding has been one of the surest processes for securing pipes for many years, but it does have several drawbacks. Aside from requiring skilled and often highly paid technicians who are difficult to find locally and retain, welding is also time consuming and costly, mainly due to the numerous quality control procedures that need to be followed. In addition, the heat generated by welding can significantly reduce the strength of the metals being joined and damage critical surface coatings. Welding can also be an extreme safety hazard on construction sites.

Mechanical pipe joining technology

The South African construction industry is beginning to explore other pipe joining alternatives to welding. One of these advanced building solutions is mechanical pipe joining technology. Globally, this technology is one of the most popular and trusted methods of securing pipes, but South Africa has been slow to catch on. Mechanical pipe joining offers a permanent, safe, and cost-effective alternative to using flanges or welding with no hot works required. The systems are accessible simply by removing two bolts from a coupling, making it easier to maintain efficient system performance. This cuts a company’s labour costs, pollution, energy usage, potential health and safety risks, as well as drastically reducing the time necessary to install and maintain these connections.

The growing popularity of mechanical pipe joining in the South African construction industry means that more local workers can be given jobs, as opposed to companies having to bring in highly skilled welders from other countries. It also becomes more essential for workers to be trained in the use of this technology. Victaulic trains hundreds of workers on various pipe grooving disciplines annually, such as roll grooving and cut grooving, as well as instruction on installation procedures of its couplings and fittings.

With mechanical pipe joining being accepted more and more in the construction and mining industries in South Africa, it provides a good opportunity for workers in these industries to be upskilled, as well as delivering a more effective and efficient building solution in a difficult climate.

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