



Gaseous fueled generator sets are used extensively for many applications. In most commercial and industrial applications, generator sets running on natural gas and LPG have a reliable source of gas from the utility company or LPG supplier. However, when gaseous fueled generator sets are using wellhead gas in Oil & Gas applications, the quality of the gas can vary considerably. This information sheet discusses the issues involved when applying a generator set to run on wellhead gas and the need for natural gas scrubbers and other filtration devices in order to ensure the quality of fuel going into the engine.

1.0 OPERATION OF GENERATOR SETS IN OIL & GAS FIELD APPLICATIONS:

In the past, small quantities of wellhead gas were considered unusable and normally flared off at well sites. More recently, generator sets in remote field operations are frequently powered by spark-ignition (SI) reciprocating engines fueled from local wellhead gas. Much of the growth is the increase in drilling for natural gas using fracturing technology termed “fracking”. Fracking operations are usually remote from the utility supply and require on-site generator sets to power several pieces of drilling equipment such as electric power drawworks, rotary tables, etc.

Also, running a generator set on wellhead gas is much more economical than using a unit running on diesel fuel, which is expensive to transport to a remote drilling location.

2.0 IMPURITY ISSUES WHEN USING WELLHEAD GAS:

Unprocessed wellhead gas is called sour gas if it contains more than 5.7 milligrams of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) per cubic meter of natural gas. Contaminants are a serious concern with wellhead gas. If not removed they can seriously damage the engine. Harmful gas components include H₂S, halogen acids, HCN, ammonia, salts and metal-containing compounds, organic halogen, sulfur, nitrogen, and silicon-containing compounds, and oils.

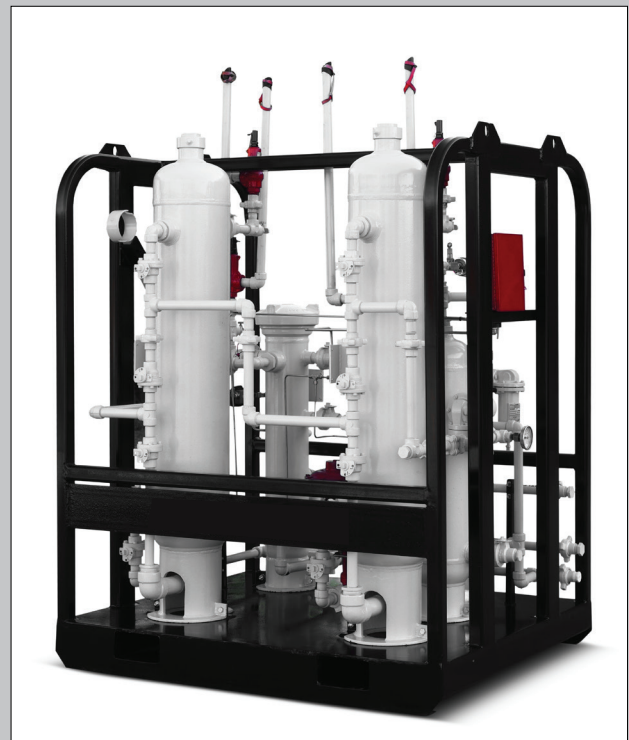
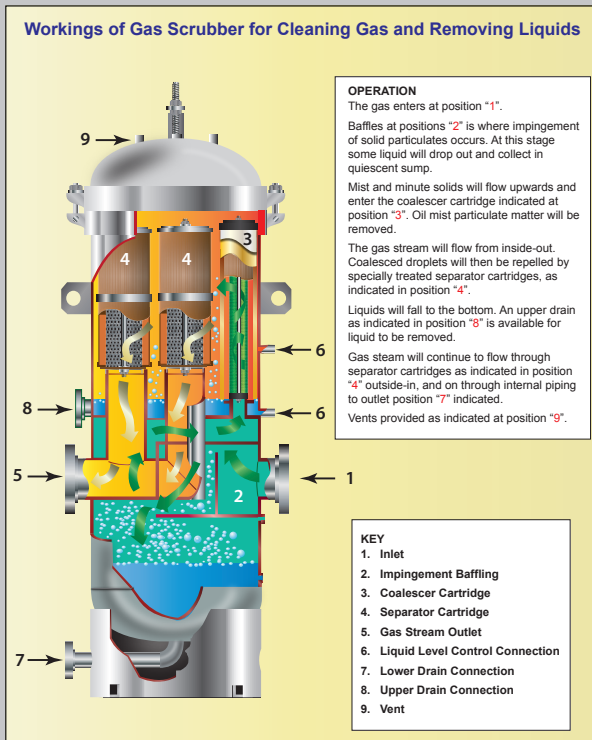
In combustion, halogen and sulfur compounds form halogen acids, SO₂, some SO₃ and possibly H₂SO₄ emissions. These acids can also corrode downstream equipment. In the fuel combustion process, nitrogen oxidizes into NO_x. To prevent corrosion and erosion of engine components, solid particulates must be kept to very low concentrations.

3.0 ENGINE MANUFACTURERS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WELLHEAD GAS APPLICATIONS:

Each engine manufacturer has recommendations and specifications for the natural gas supply needed to avoid a reduction in the performance of its engines. The specifications detail the variations in maximum and minimum percentages of calorific value, and all elements in the natural gas. Any engine warranty can be voided if operators ignore these specifications.

4.0 POTENTIAL DAMAGE TO ENGINES USING WELLHEAD GAS:

Solid particulates in the fuel are the most damaging of all impurities in wellhead gas. Particular care needs to be taken to treat the natural gas (NG) before it is applied to a SI engine. Apart from corroding engine components, these impurities (detailed in clause 3) can shorten engine life, lessen reliability and reduce power output. Also, impurities can increase engine exhaust emissions and invalidate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certification designated to the engine.



The installation information provided in this information sheet is informational in nature only, and should not be considered the advice of a properly licensed and qualified electrician or used in place of a detailed review of the applicable National Electric Codes and local codes. Specific questions about how this information may affect any particular situation should be addressed to a licensed and qualified electrician.

5.0 SOLUTIONS TO ENGINES USING WELLHEAD GAS:

The primary solutions to ensure that correct gas specification is being used by the engine are fuel scrubbing, droplet separation and filtration.

Gas scrubbers and water separators are pre-treatment devices placed between the wellhead gas supply and the engine fuel inlet to ensure fuel contamination does not exceed the manufacturer's specifications.

Note: If landfill gas is the fuel source, it frequently contains chlorine compounds, sulfur compounds, organic acids and silicon compounds that all require pre-treatment also.

6.0 FIRST STAGE PRE-TREATMENT OF WELLHEAD GAS:

Liquid water and oil condensates are separated from the "wet" gas. In some instances both heaters and scrubbers are installed. Heaters elevate the gas temperature to avoid formation of ice-like methane hydrates, while the gas scrubber removes any solid particles. First stage pre-treatment devices will treat and remove the principal impurities such as water; separate any natural gas liquids (NGL), and remove sulfur and carbon dioxide.

7.0 SECOND STAGE PRE-TREATMENT OF WELLHEAD GAS:

Second stage pre-treatment removes any water vapor that may be present in solution, by either absorption or adsorption dehydrating processes. The absorption process is when water vapor is taken out by a dehydrating agent. The adsorption process is when the water vapor is condensed and collected.

Glycol dehydration is a frequently employed absorption process. A liquid desiccant is used to absorb the water vapor from the gas stream. Either diethylene glycol (DEG) or triethylene glycol (TEG) is put into the "wet" stream. These glycol particles sink to bottom of the collector body after absorbing the water vapor. Solid desiccant dehydration for the adsorption method is usually accomplished with two or more towers filled with solid desiccants such as silica gel to sequester water vapor in the wet NG is sequestered on the desiccant surface

8.0 SULFUR AND CARBON DIOXIDE REMOVAL:

Wellhead NG can contain significant amounts of sulfur and carbon dioxide which should be removed before the NG is used as fuel. The process to remove hydrogen sulfide is similar to the glycol dehydration described under 8.0. Most frequently, the NG is bubbled through a tower containing an amine solution that has an affinity for sulfur. The amine solution is typically then regenerated. It is also possible to use solid desiccants such as iron sponges to remove the sulfur and carbon dioxide.

9.0 ALTERNATE GAS-PROCESSING TECHNOLOGIES:

Small scale systems are packaged with functions that can include acid gas removal, dehydration, nitrogen rejection and NGL recovery.

In general, potential acid gases to be removed from NG streams are CO₂ and H₂S. CO₂ is essentially a neutral compound and is removed by forming carbonic acid in most cases. H₂S is more reactive and easier to remove.

10.0 PACKAGES:

Suitable packaged units containing the necessary elements to handle the particular NG are assembled in a heavy-duty frame that protects them from any field operational knocks or damage. These are mounted on a steel skid base to handle or move as one piece of portable equipment. Any pressure vessels used should meet appropriate American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) codes.

Constituent (NG = Wellhead Gas)	Natural Gas	LPG	Digester Gas	Landfill Gas
	Percentages			
Methane CH ₄	80 - 97	0	35 - 65	40 - 60
Ethane C ₂ H ₆	3 - 15	0 - 2	0	0
Propane C ₃ H ₈	0 - 3	75 - 97	0	0
Butane C ₄ H ₁₀	0 - 0.9	0 - 2	0	0
Higher C _x H _x	0 - 0.2	0 - 20	0	0
Carbon Dioxide CO ₂	0 - 1.8	0	30 - 40	40 - 60
Nitrogen N ₂	0 - 14	0	1 - 2	0 - 13
H ₂	0 - 0.1	0	0	0
Lower Heating Value (LHV) (Btu/scf)	830 - 1075	2500	300 - 600	350 - 550

Source: SFA Pacific, Inc.; North American Combustion Handbook

To fulfill our commitment to be the leading supplier in the power generation industry, the Buckeye Power Sales team ensures they are always up-to-date with the current power industry standards as well as industry trends. As a service, our Information Sheets are circulated on a regular basis to existing and potential power customers to maintain their awareness of changes and developments in standards, codes and technology within the power industry.



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