



Environmentally compatible, safe and reliable degreasing in aircraft manufacturing

# NEU-TRI™<sup>o</sup> E TRICHLOROETHYLENE – THE APPROVED GRADE AT BAE SYSTEMS SAMLESBURY

**Trichloroethylene had been used at BAE Systems Samlesbury (UK) since the early 1980's for degreasing aircraft components. In order to improve quality, sustainability and safety of the cleaning process, the company looked for an alternative cleaning agent. Pretty much all options had been investigated during a period of nearly four years, but none could offer advantages similar to those of NEU-TRI™<sup>o</sup> E Trichloroethylene offered by SAFECHEM Europe GmbH. It is supplied in the SAFE-TAINER™ closed-loop transfer system and with services to extend the lifespan significantly. In combination with a new state-of-the-art degreaser the consumption of solvent could be reduced significantly from around 5 tons a year to less than half a ton.**

BAE Systems is the second largest global defence company and a security enterprise with approximately 100,000 employees worldwide. The company delivers a full range of products and services for air, land and naval forces, as well as advanced electronics, security, information technology solutions and support services to customers in more than 100 countries. At the site in Samlesbury (UK), BAE Systems provides manufacturing and support capabilities to a number of internationally important aircraft programmes including Eurofighter Typhoon and F35-Lightning II in addition to work on unmanned air vehicle demonstrators.

Like in all BAE Systems sites around the world, reducing the impact on the environment by cutting Volatile Organic Compound (VOCs) emissions during manufacturing processes and improving the work conditions regarding safety and health, these are just some of the main targets at Samlesbury.

Installing a remarkably high quality cleaning solution The site has a history of forming and fabricating aluminium components for a range of civilian and military aircrafts. A critical step in the process is the adequate removal of contaminations during manufacture to allow subsequent surface treatment of the components. To ensure that the necessary level of cleanliness is achieved, BAE Systems Samlesbury used trichloroethylene in an open top degreaser for many years. This required not only that the maintenance operator had to wear breathing apparatus but also the use of significant quantities of the chlorinated solvent, which made BAE Systems one of the UK's largest users of the chemical. Concerned about the high consumption of the chemical and the VOC emissions caused by the cleaning process, the company wanted to look for alternatives. It also wanted to increase quality, performance and EH&S (Environment, Health & Safety).

During a period of nearly four years the company investigated all possible options. These included water-based cleaning agents and other solvents such as hydrocarbons and n-Propyl Bromide (nPB). They were bench-marked against NEU-TRI™<sup>o</sup> E Trichloroethylene in the SAFE-TAINER™ System. BAE Systems found from its testings that NEU-TRI™<sup>o</sup> E was capable of reliably removing all the contaminations which occur through the use of up to 16 different oils and greases during the manufacturing process thereby ensuring the quality needed. This resulted in an approval for NEU-TRI™<sup>o</sup> E Trichloroethylene by BAE Systems.



The chlorinated solvent is used in a modern, closed cleaning facility which operates under vacuum. It is designed to clean 12 aluminium sheets of 2,000 x 2,600 mm or a mass of 700 kg in one cycle. With this capacity the new degreaser is one of the largest machines of its kind in Europe, and potentially the world. The cleaning process is carried out fully automated and includes high pressure spray washing, vapour degreasing, and vacuum drying. At the end of the 30 to 40 minute cleaning cycle the trichloroethylene is collected, distilled, condensed and absorbed into a carbon bed within the facility, so virtually no solvent fumes occur when the door opens.

### Virtually emission-free solvent use

In combination with the new cleaning plant the SAFE-TAINER™ closed-loop transfer system can enable an emission-free cleaning process. This state-of-the-art delivery and handling system for solvents consists of two separate, specially designed containers, one for fresh and one for used solvent. Each container is delivered with a standard drum inside. The steel container protects the drum, preventing damage or spills. They are easy to handle and to store and help allow a safe management of chlorinated solvents on site. During the solvent transfer to the cleaning machine a special leak-free, dry-break coupling prevents spills and vapour emissions. When transferring used solvent from the cleaning machine to the SAFE-TAINER™ container, a dry-break coupling adapter and a vapour return connection prevent emissions. This protects the operator and environment from potential contact with the solvent.

### Solvent maintenance for reduced consumption

In addition to the SAFE-TAINER™ System, SAFECEM offers simple and efficient solutions to monitor and maintain the quality of NEU-TRI™ E Trichloroethylene. Due to the rising concentration of oils and greases and their decomposition products, which are removed from the aluminium surfaces in the cleaning process, this can slowly degrade the chlorinated solvent.

The MAXICHECK™ Test Kit and business logbook can enable the operator to check the alkalinity level and the acid acceptance of the solvent regularly in an easy and quick manner and plot the results. If necessary, MAXISTAB™ Stabiliser can be added to keep stabiliser concentration at the optimum level. This offers not only a maximum cleaning quality, it also helps BAE Systems to protect their cleaning facility against acidification and corrosion and minimise solvent usage by means of an extended life-span. It has generated impressive results. Since the newly purchased cleaning system and NEU-TRI™ E Trichloroethylene have been in use, the consumption has dropped from around 5 tons per annum to less than half a ton and the system meets all specifications of the Solvent Emissions Directive (SED). Furthermore, BAE Systems has achieved a high performance as well as minimised risk to operators and the working environment.



**If you would like to seek advice on achieving the best parts cleaning results, please contact:**

SAFECEM Europe GmbH  
 Tersteegenstr. 25  
 40474 Düsseldorf  
 Telefon: +49 211 4389-300  
 E-mail: [service@safechem.com](mailto:service@safechem.com)  
[www.safechem.com](http://www.safechem.com)

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