


PROJECT SUMMARY

- Shop finishing 1,400 tons of structural steel for a subway station at the former site of the World Trade Center
- Mandate for construction to begin before the first anniversary of September 11 put project on a fast pace

PRODUCTS IN USE

- Three-coat Sherwin-Williams system: Zinc Clad IV primer; Macropoxy 646 intermediate coat; Corothane II topcoat

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A subway station is under construction at the former site of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan

ING UP

New subway station signals rebirth in lower Manhattan

Today, this block of lower Manhattan real estate is known by those who work there as The Hole.

It has had other names. It was long known as the site of the Twin Towers. Then, tragically, unforgettably, the world suddenly came to know it as Ground Zero.

But workers at the site now call it The Hole because that's what it is, about 80 feet deep and more than 200 yards wide in spots. It is mostly empty now, clear of debris.

On the eastern side, however, new steel rises from its base almost to street level. Under construction is a subway station for an underground light rail system that will carry commuters to lower Manhattan from New Jersey, just as it had before September 11.

The site buzzes with activity like any other major jobsite, and there appears to be a clear sense of purpose among those working on the station, despite the fact that plans for what will occupy the space above it are still in the hands of architects.

Perhaps the level of activity is a residual effect. Last year the Port Authority, the local governmental agency that oversees transportation matters, ambitiously mandated that steel erection for the station begin on the site before the first anniversary of September 11.

To the world, the message intended by fast-tracking this project to such a degree was clear: we will rebuild, we will recover. To contractors, the plan sent an additional message: you could be required to produce faster than you ever have before.

PATH EXPERIENCE

Prior to bidding on this project, Bridgewater Protective Coatings (BPC) of Bridgewater, N.J., had had some experience with the Port Authority. In 2001, the firm won a bid to finish some steel canopies and structural steel for the Hoboken, N.J., train station, coincidentally a stop on the PATH train line that had served the World Trade Center. When the topcoat of a three-coat system originally specified for the project failed to cure properly, BPC Project Manager Wayne Chilewski suggested a switch to a Sherwin-Williams system. The Port Authority quickly approved the new spec and BPC was shipping steel to Hoboken before the end of the day.

With that experience in hand as well as 20 years of experience as a specialty coatings contractor, BPC president Jack Scholz bid on the World Trade Center PATH station

project in May 2002. BPC won the bid, and the company readied itself to meet the specification selected by the Port Authority — a three-coat Sherwin-Williams system to include a prime coat of Zinc Clad IV at 3-5 mils dft, an intermediate coat of MacroPoxy 646 FastCure at 5-10 mils dft, and a topcoat of Corothane II Satin at 3-4 mils dft, all shop applied. But other details on the project weren't finalized until mid-August, and the September 11 deadline suddenly loomed large.

"We originally bid this as a 15-week project, but as the schedule became set and it became clear we'd have to move far more quickly than we had intended, there was a question as to whether or not we could handle it," says Chilewski. "The Port Authority audited our facility to see if we could."

NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

Chilewski and Scholz passed the Port Authority's audition, but this project would not be business as usual. For starters, Port Authority mandated that one of their inspectors be on the premises full-time. Additionally, BPC added 15 people in painting and support roles to its normal full-time payroll of 35.

BPC had never run more than one shift since Scholz started the company in 1987, but it was now obvious they'd have to run round the clock on this project. Chilewski and Scholz scheduled sandblasters to work two 12-hour shifts. Painters worked 12-hour shifts as well, but these shifts were staggered to take advantage of the quick recoat and cure times of the coatings.

"The first crew would prime, and the second crew would come in three hours later because they could immediately recoat the prime coat," says Chilewski. "When the intermediate coat cured three hours later, that's when the third crew would start. Three hours after they applied the topcoat, the steel would have to be cured enough to load onto a truck because the erection crews at the jobsite were going to put the steel up as fast as we got it to them.

"The recoat and cure times of these products would prove to be very critical to our success on this project."

Timing would be critical indeed, given that the first load of steel, being fabricated by Canron Construction in Conklin, N.Y., did not arrive until August 23, less than three weeks before the mandated start of on-site erection.

CONTRACTOR SPOTLIGHT

BPC Broadens Services

A 100,000-lb. outdoor crane and a 60,000-square-foot environmentally controlled work area at the 12-acre Bridgewater Protective Coatings facility are testament that painting structural steel will remain at the heart of the firm's services.

But the company continues to diversify, according to Project Manager Wayne Chilewski.

"At various times we've been arguably the largest player in the country with regard to rubber linings," says Chilewski. "That capability remains a strength of this company."

BPC is also currently at work on a bridge resurfacing project, applying a 3/8-inch-thick aggregate-filled epoxy overlay to 250,000 square feet of bridge decking for the American Bridge Company. Also high on the job shop's priority list is work for Alstom, a major power generator producer, and working a range of steel-coating tasks for Canron Construction Corp.

"These clients know we're going to turn out a quality product," says Chilewski. "That's how we've made a niche in this business."

Truckloads of unfinished steel, ranging from 56-foot beams to 10-inch flanges and angle braces, were suddenly arriving at a steady pace. The first finished pieces left BPC on August 26, giving erection crews sufficient time to successfully weld new steel into place before September 11. Once that goal was met, the BPC shop continued to keep up the pace. Soon they were cycling out finished steel, from trailer off-load to reload, in as little as a day's time.

"It was our responsibility to keep the erectors supplied with finished steel," says Chilewski. "That eventually became a condition of the contract."

Eight weeks and 75 truckloads later, BPC's role in the project was complete.

BPC is back to being a one-shift shop for now. Scholz and Chilewski await word on whether they've won the bid to perform work on the second phase of the PATH station project, which will involve the shop coating of 600 tons of steel as the station moves toward its goal of being operational by June, 2003.

By that time, BPC will have played a small but important role in giving The Hole a new identity. ▣

