

Dock Equipment Offers Safety for People and Product at Leading Burger Chain

Company:
In-N-Out Burger
Las Vegas, NV

Challenge:
Keeping products fresh while
shipping to local restaurants.

Solution:
VertiCool™ Doors by TKO®,
Serco® Vertical Storing Dock
Levelers, Serco Master Control
Panels, Serco Dock Seals, APS
Resource® LED Dock Lights and
Serco Universal Truck-Chock™
In-Ground Wheel Restraints.

Industry:
Food and Beverage

Geography:
Las Vegas, NV

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- Tom Buffum, Facilities Manager for
the In-N-Out Burger

There might be bigger, better-known fast food chains in the burger-loving USA, but few create the fun, feel-good loyalty that fans have for the In-N-Out Burger chain.

It started in 1948 when husband and wife owners Harry and Esther Snyder opened the first In-N-Out Burger location in their Southern California hometown of Baldwin Park, making it the city's first drive-thru restaurant. Since then, In-N-Out has become a regional favorite, opening nearly 300 locations in four southwestern states and Texas, building a legion of followers along the way.

Part of the reason In-N-Out has such strong customer loyalty is due to the company's unwavering dedication to its associates, which in turn creates top-notch customer service for patrons. In addition, In-N-Out associate compensation is well above the average range for the fast food industry and the company invests time in associate training. Most importantly, it regards them as family.

This devotion to crew is reflected in the way In-N-Out equips their distribution centers. At their recently opened 20,000 square foot Las Vegas Distribution Center, In-N-Out paired VertiCool™ Doors by TKO® with Serco® Vertical Storing Dock Levelers, Serco Master Control Panels, APS Resource® FT Ultra LED dock lights, Serco dock seals



and Serco Universal Truck-Chock™ In-Ground Wheel Restraints to protect both their team and their product.

Part of what adds to In-N-Out's mystique is that it expands slowly and deliberately, building up desire among fans for a location to open near them. As In-N-Out opened a handful of restaurants near Las Vegas over a period of a few years, everything they need including burgers, buns, vegetables and supplies was brought in along Highway 15 from the Baldwin Park DC. Once In-N-Out reached a determined number of locations, the company opened a distribution center to serve the 20 restaurants that draw tourists and residents from The Strip and other areas surrounding Las Vegas.

A lot of planning and analysis went into the selection of dock equipment for the newly constructed facility. According to Tom Buffum, the chain's Facilities Manager, “with the previous brand we used at our Phoenix location we weren't completely satisfied, so we entertained other leading manufacturers for the

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facility in Las Vegas, plus Serco and TKO equipment offered design advantages to help our associates work safer and more efficiently.”

The steady stream of In-N-Out trucks bring fresh, pre-formed hamburger patties to Las Vegas. Also pulling up at the seven loading docks are a variety of trucks dropping off soda syrups, milk, potatoes and lettuce that go into the cooler. Shipments of restaurant supplies include cups, napkins and straws that go up on racks. Workers must be able to handle everything that comes through the dock, safely and efficiently.

When trucks pull up to the dock, either to unload or pick up supplies, a Serco Master Control Panel orchestrates operation of the loading dock equipment to ensure proper sequence of operation and safe truck access and to avoid associate injury and product damage. The Master Control Panel eliminates the extra wiring and potential maintenance problems associated with multiple controllers for the each piece of dock equipment. As a personal touch Serco offered a customized dock system by powder coating the control panel and mounting stanchion in the signature In-N-Out red and yellow colors.

The hydraulically operated in-ground restraint automatically chocks the trailer’s rear wheels. The Universal Truck-Chock provides continuous restraining force to the chocked wheel, reducing the probability of landing gear collapse, vehicle creep or vehicle walk. The chock is flush



mounted in-ground, which means no interference with yard and dock area cleanup or removal of sand that can blow in from the Nevada desert.

Along with enabling safer truck access, the Truck-Chock ensures the trailer is completely encased by the heavy-duty Serco dock seal. “We wanted to make sure we have a good enclosure around the truck wall to protect our people and products from the elements and debris,” points out Buffum.

Once the truck is secured, the control system activates a motor drive to open the VertiCool overhead doors. “We went with powered doors for safety purposes,” says Buffum, “to keep our team members out of the deployment arc of the vertical leveler.”

The VertiCool Doors incorporate 4”

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thick closed-cell XEPS foam panels, rated R-23 and are typically used to prevent energy loss on chilled docks. Though the temperature in the In-N-Out loading dock area is basically ambient and mitigated by coolers, for Buffum the VertiCool doors made sense for In-N-Out’s application.

Consider what is on the other side of the wall, 100 degree Las Vegas heat, which conventional metal dock doors transmit onto a loading dock. VertiCool doors have heavy-duty, full door height polymer thermal-break track wrapped with energy reflective foil fabric that prevents heat transmission that can occur with conventional metal tracks.

Another potential problem is the desert surrounding Las Vegas. “We have dust storms of Biblical proportions,” notes Buffum, “and enclosure is important.” “This is a food grade warehouse and we cannot afford being marked down on inspections

because of gaps in our doors.” The VertiCool doors offer In-N-Out two distinct features that provide a doorway seal to pass inspections and help maintain their famous quality. The 48” panel height reduces the number of panel joints by 50% compared with 24” panels on conventional doors and has a more effective seal around its full perimeter. The dual compression side seals are mounted to door panels and removed from the impact zone when the door is open, preventing seals from sustaining damage. At the header is a dual overlapping seal and on the floor, dual compression bottom seals. “When checking out the door,” points out Buffum, “you don’t see sunlight coming through.”

The addition of Serco Vertical Storing Dock Levelers ensures an added layer of protection against the elements, debris and forklift impacts. Stored upright, the steel platform stands guard in front of the dock door



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protecting it against accidental forklift impacts. The levelers also protect the facility’s certification because they are mounted to the floor and not in a pit the vertical leveler design ensures the dock stays clean.

The In-N-Out trucks pulling in from Baldwin Park have lift gates that bring product to ground level for unloading at the restaurants. The Serco hydraulic powered Vertical Levelers have a powered dual-acting lip to access In-N-Out trucks and all the other trucks they see at the loading dock.

The issues with their previous equipment in Phoenix were two fold. First, the leveler lip needs to clear the lift gate at the end of the truck trailer to provide stability for the forklifts as they enter and exit the truck trailers. Additionally their Phoenix operation was inefficient due to the leveler lip not resting on the refrigerated trailer floor sill, thus creating a speed bump for the forklift operator. Working with John Williams from Casco Equipment, located in Riverside, CA, the decision was made to add a custom 24” long lip in lieu of the standard available 20” with a special taper to ensure the platform makes solid contact with the trailer floor, doesn’t interfere with the liftgate, and also eliminates the operator’s speed bump.

The In-N-Out trucks ride on higher profile tires because, according to Buffum, “these tires give our trucks a better look as they go down the highway. They are our rolling billboards. The longer, dual acting lip enables access

to these high-riding trucks and can be positioned from the control panel.

Safe truck access also requires that the area be properly illuminated. The durable FT Ultra LED™ dock light with its flexible arm enables the 15-watt LED lamp to be positioned where needed for proper visibility and loading safety. With its long lasting 50,000-hour life, this light meets USDA requirements for food handling facilities.

Once the truck is loaded or unloaded, the team member uses the Master Control panel to return the vertical leveler to its upright position and close the door. The system allows the Truck-Chock to release the vehicle so it can hit the road.

Buffum credits the TKO/Serco dealer Casco Equipment with collaborating on the dock design and making the project work, especially on the modification to the powered lip on the vertical leveler. “The service was outstanding, the training was there, the quality was there, and they were actively involved as we built the building.”

The In-N-Out distribution facility is proof that when it comes to building a positive reputation and a committed fan base, attention to quality must be given in places customers never see.

