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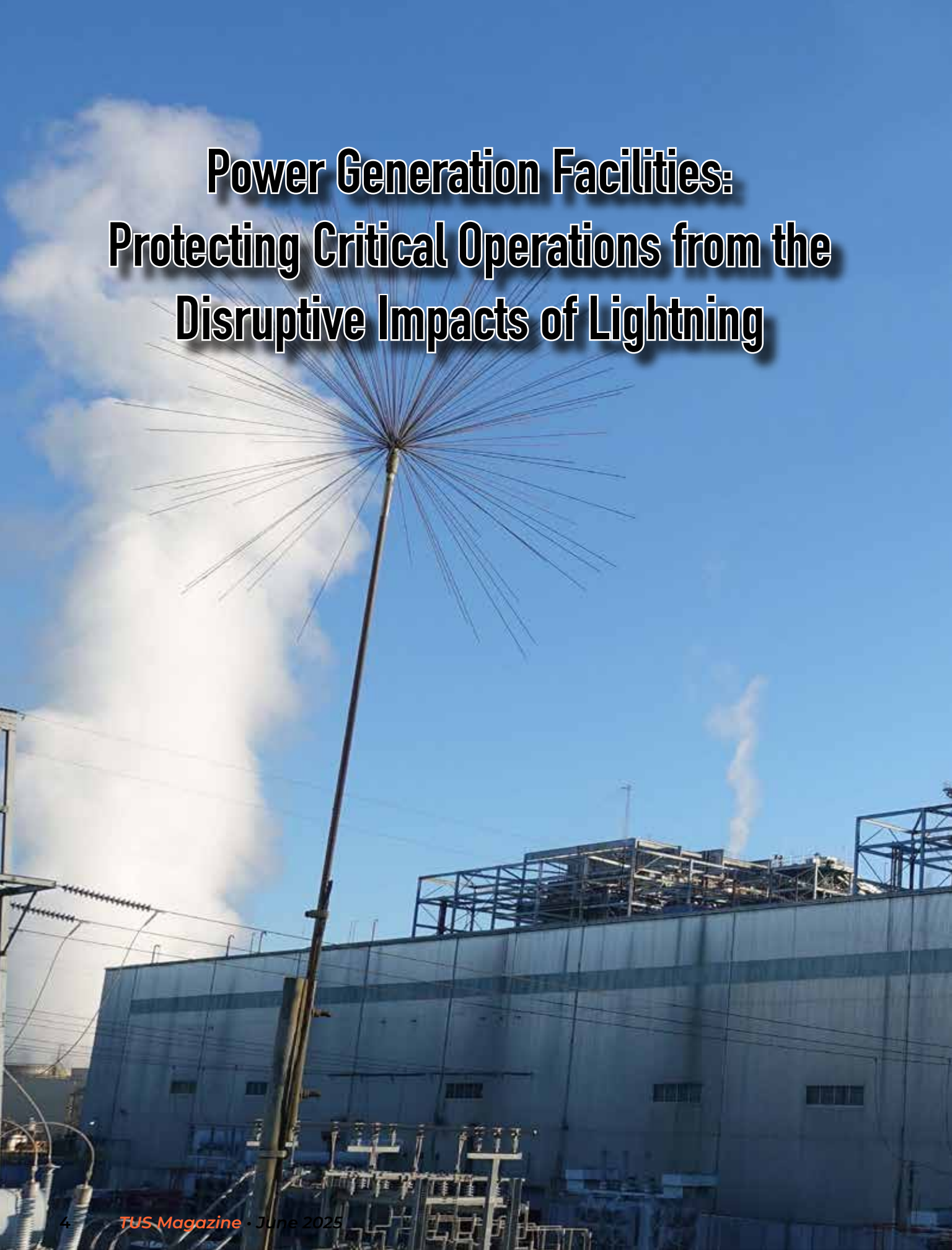
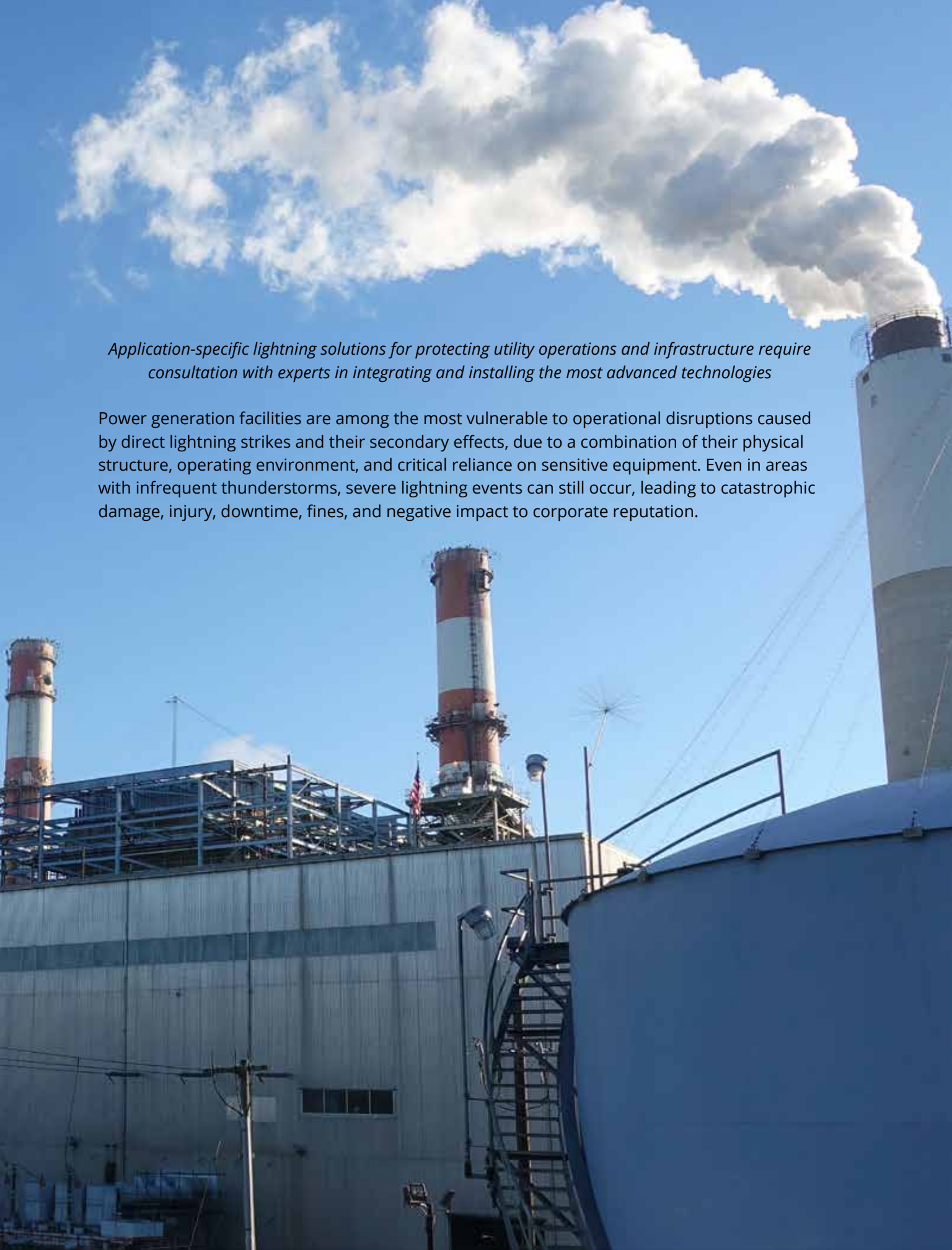
Power Generation Facilities: Protecting Critical Operations from the Disruptive Impacts of Lightning





Application-specific lightning solutions for protecting utility operations and infrastructure require consultation with experts in integrating and installing the most advanced technologies

Power generation facilities are among the most vulnerable to operational disruptions caused by direct lightning strikes and their secondary effects, due to a combination of their physical structure, operating environment, and critical reliance on sensitive equipment. Even in areas with infrequent thunderstorms, severe lightning events can still occur, leading to catastrophic damage, injury, downtime, fines, and negative impact to corporate reputation.

When this occurs, the financial consequences can be devastating. A single strike can ignite fires, destroy valuable assets, and lead to costly downtime and environmental damage.

This is leading many power generation facilities to adopt lightning defense strategies designed to protect structures, equipment, and personnel. However, with many technological advances since the invention of the Franklin Lightning Rod more than 250 years ago, navigating the maze of potential lightning protection solutions can be daunting.

Lightning defense is a specialized body of knowledge that has accumulated since the days of Ben Franklin. Broadly speaking, lightning defense encompasses two key approaches: lightning protection and lightning avoidance, such as Charge Transfer technologies. Proper grounding and surge protection are also critical.

Due to the wide range of available technologies, mounting an effective defense against lightning-related threats typically requires a tailored strategy that integrates multiple solutions, each having its own specific purpose for minimizing damage or avoiding it altogether. The optimal combination depends on the specific site conditions and the nature of the operation.

To navigate this complexity effectively, it is essential to engage qualified lightning protection experts who can conduct thorough site evaluations, identify and prioritize vulnerabilities, and recommend appropriate protection solutions.

“Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, lightning protection and mitigation recommendations should be tailored to a facility’s unique vulnerabilities, whether that involves direct strike avoidance, second-

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ary damage caused by a nearby strike, or grounding improvements," says Brian Daugherty, Engineering Sales Manager at Lightning Eliminators & Consultants, Inc. (LEC), a pioneer in the field of lightning protection in since 1971.

According to Daugherty, LEC engineering and sales engineers have a combined over 160 years of experience in lightning protection. Today, LEC's solutions protect critical operations and structures for some of the world's most recognized companies, including Federal Express, UPS, Marathon Petroleum, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Telluride Ski Resort, and thousands more.

Vulnerabilities Exposed

According to Daugherty, power generation facilities are particularly vulnerable to lightning strikes due to several interrelated factors. Sites are often located in open areas such as flat plains with elevated structures, which naturally increases their exposure to lightning. Many generation facilities, especially those using fossil fuels, natural gas, or nuclear power, have tall structures such as stacks, turbines, cooling towers, or transmission towers that naturally attract lightning.

Modern generation facilities also rely heavily on sensitive electronics and digital control systems (e.g., SCADA, PLCs, CEMS) that are highly sensitive to transient overvoltages. Even indirect strikes can disrupt or damage these systems.

Since generation facilities operate continuously and are often critical to grid stability, even momentary disruptions can lead to significant operational or safety consequences. Restarting after shutdowns can be a slow and complex process, making lightning-induced outages particularly costly during high-demand periods.

Reputational damage is an often overlooked but impactful risk. Frequent lightning-related disruptions can erode public trust, particularly if service delivery or product quality is compromised.

Even when a direct strike is avoided or successfully mitigated, the residual effects—such as earth currents, atmospheric transients, secondary arcing, electromagnetic pulses (EMP), and ground potential

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rise (GPR) can severely degrade system components. These secondary effects can result in equipment failure, operational downtime, or even false and erroneous system behavior.

Compounding the challenge, utility demands are expected to rise over the next five years largely because of the growth in electric vehicles, electric heating systems like heat pumps, and the rapid expansion of data centers. Charging stations for electric vehicles, especially high-speed chargers, require large amounts of electricity at once, placing new and heavy demands on local grids. In homes and businesses, electric heat pumps are replacing gas or oil systems, sharply increasing electricity use during heating and cooling seasons. Data centers, which support cloud computing and artificial intelligence, consume massive amounts of continuous power and are being built at a faster pace across many regions.

For these reasons, comprehensive lightning protection systems are critical in safeguarding facilities from structural damage, catastrophic safety incidents, unplanned downtime, and expensive process restarts.

Protecting Facilities

Daugherty says the appropriate combination of solutions can only be determined through a comprehensive evaluation of each facility's current protection measures, grounding systems, and overall risk exposure.

"Understanding a facility's past issues, vulnerabilities, and protection goals helps determine whether the solution should focus on grounding enhancements, surge protection, direct strike avoidance, secondary damage from a nearby strike, or a combination of all three," says Daugherty.

By conducting a thorough site assessment, LEC helps facilities identify vulnerabilities and implement customized mitigation strategies, whether that means improving grounding, adding targeted surge protection, or implementing direct strike mitigation solutions.

Prevention is the Best Defense

According to Daugherty, the most effective defense is to prevent a lightning strike from occurring. This is

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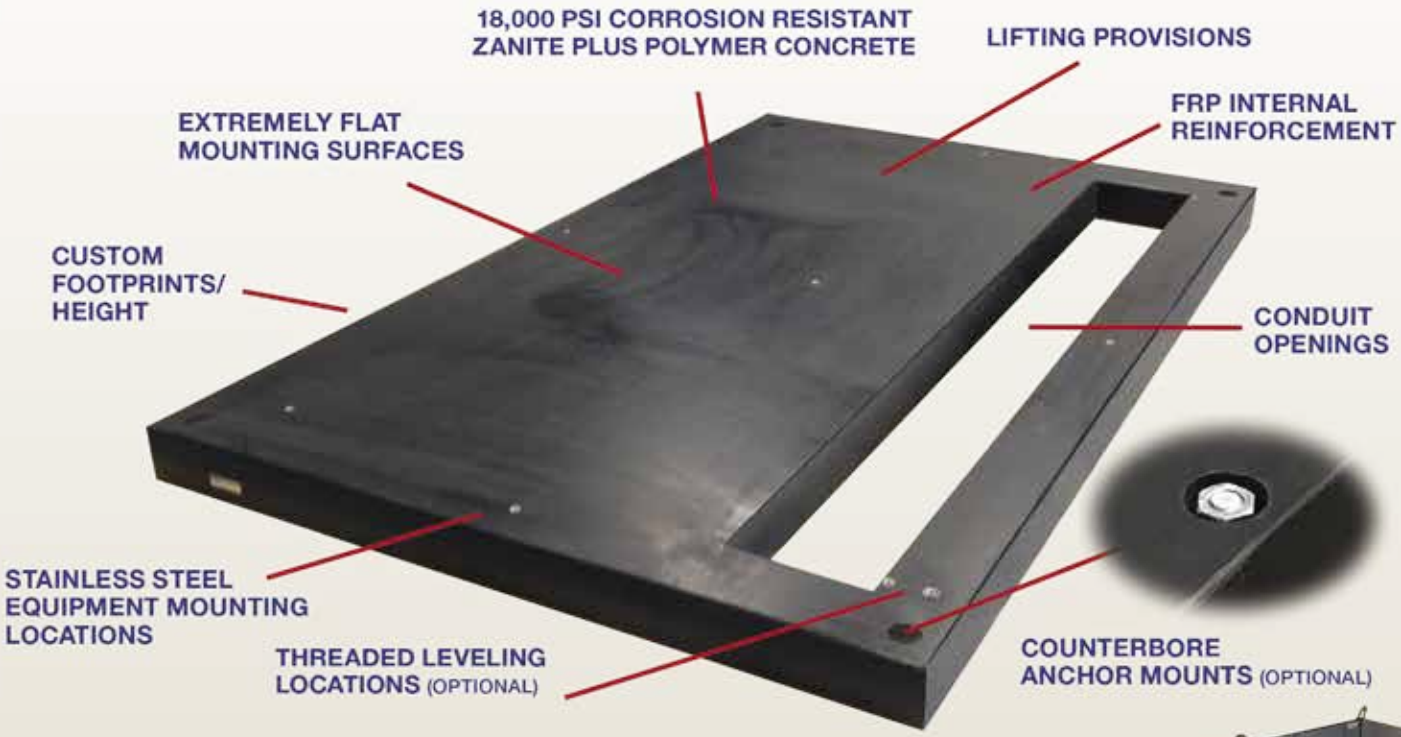

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a far superior solution than a lightning rod-based system that attracts lightning to the protected site and then attempts to manage the strike.

Lightning occurs when the difference in potential between storm clouds and the earth reaches a critical level, triggering an electrical discharge. For lightning to strike, it requires a connection between a downward leader from the cloud and an upward streamer from the ground.

The Dissipation Array System® (DAS®) from LEC is designed to prevent direct lightning strikes within its designated protection area by lowering the electric field to levels below those required for lightning to form.

DAS prevents these connections by using point discharge technology, which neutralizes the charge differential before a strike can occur. Through a system of well-grounded points, DAS facilitates the exchange of ions between the air and the ground, disrupting the conditions necessary for a lightning strike.

DAS can be integrated with a wide range of structures, including buildings, towers, tanks, and stacks. Since its inception, over 3,500 DAS installations have been deployed worldwide, accumulating more than 90,000 system-years of effective performance. Testimonials from industry leaders confirm its effectiveness, with companies reporting significant reductions in downtime, maintenance costs and improved reliability.

LEC even offers a "No-Strike" warranty for all supervised installations, ensuring complete protection when the system is properly maintained and inspected.

The effectiveness of DAS is enhanced when combined with a comprehensive lightning protection system that includes a low-impedance grounding system, transient voltage surge suppression, and modular strike prevention devices. Together, these components ensure optimal protection against both direct strikes and secondary electrical surges.

Expertise in Installation

While the proper combination of component technologies is crucial, having a single source oversee the installation of these systems can also be a key aspect of effective implementation.

Traditional lightning protection methods typically involve engaging separate vendors for system design, material procurement, and installation. This fragmented approach often results in miscommunication, extended project timelines, and increased costs.

"A turnkey provider that consolidates all project phases under a single expert team ensures unified accountability, accelerates execution through streamlined coordination, improves system performance through integrated component design, and lowers overall costs by reducing errors, rework, and inefficiencies caused by misaligned vendor efforts," says Daugherty.

Considering the increasing risks posed by lightning-related events, power generation facilities cannot afford to rely on outdated or piecemeal lightning protection strategies. As operations be-

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come more complex and the consequences of downtime more severe, the need for a site-specific lightning protection strategy is imperative. Technological advancements now offer a range of solutions far beyond traditional methods, but selecting the right combination requires deep expertise and an understanding of each facility's unique vulnerabilities.

To ensure maximum safety, reliability, and operational continuity, facilities are strongly encouraged to schedule a professional site assessment. A tailored evaluation by qualified experts can uncover hidden risks, assess the effectiveness of existing systems, and guide the implementation of integrated lightning protection strategies. This proactive step not only safeguards critical infrastructure and personnel but also helps prevent costly disruptions and reinforces a facility's long-term resilience against lightning-related threats.

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Sawing Solo: Portable Sawmills Optimized for Single-User Operation

Advanced hydraulic sawmills enable smooth, precise cutting with minimal effort, whether working solo or with a team

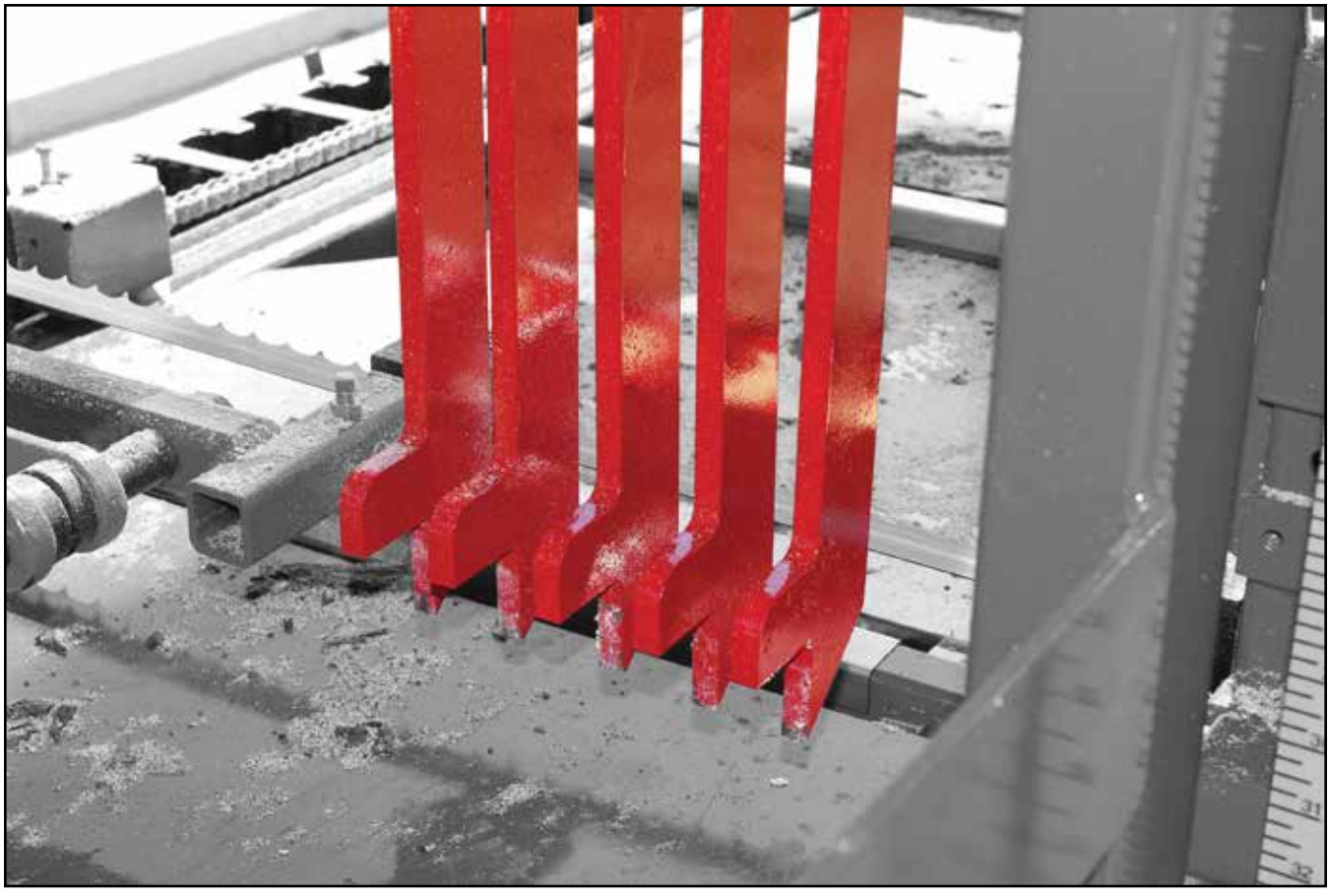
The growing demand for high-efficiency wood processing is driving a surge in the popularity of advanced portable sawmills. These compact yet powerful machines offer unmatched versatility, giving users the ability to process timber on-site and on-demand.

With their durable construction, precision-engineered components, and scalable functionality, a sawmill represents a strategic investment for sawmill operators, loggers, farmers, home builders, and woodworking professionals. Their versatility and reliability enable users to maintain profitability while adapting to varying production demands and market conditions.

Although sawmills are designed for operation by small teams of up to four people, many are, in reality, run by a single operator. As a result, a growing number of sawyers are adopting portable sawmills specifically optimized for solo operation.

These models offer efficient, user-friendly features that enable a single operator to manage the milling process effectively, reducing labor costs while maintaining high productivity. The units help reduce operator fatigue through features like hydraulic log loaders, drag-back systems, and remote controls. With integrated hydraulics, a single operator can efficiently manage thousands of pounds of logs with minimal manual set-up and physical strain.

When production demands increase, the same equipment can be operated by up to four individuals simultaneously, boosting productivity in larger-scale operations. Converting a portable sawmill to a stationary configuration is straightforward, offering flexibility to adapt to evolving operational needs.



One example of this approach is Runquist Sawmill Services in Mount Enterprise, Texas. Blending advanced milling capabilities with a commitment to craftsmanship, the company produces an extensive range of products—including live edge and straight edge planks, beams, super wide planks, fireplace mantels, book matched sets, pallet boards, and reclaimed wood. With specialized expertise in hand-hewn lumber and custom cutting for client-supplied logs, Runquist demonstrates how today's portable sawmill innovations can support both high-quality production and personalized service.

According to Troy Runquist, owner of Runquist Sawmill Services, selecting the optimal sawmill equipment that could provide the required precision, efficiency, and volume as his business grew was critical to his success.

"Accuracy was my top priority—I wanted to produce consistent, dimensionally exact lumber. If a customer requested 8/4 (two-inch thick) material, I wanted to deliver it precisely," says Runquist.

Runquist says that he spent two to three years researching and evaluating equipment. "I think I looked at every sawmill under the sun at the time," he recalls. He eventually selected a portable AC-36 sawmill from Cooks Saw, a leading manufacturer in portable bandsaw technology (https://www.youtube.com/@CooksSawmills).

The diesel-powered unit is designed to handle much bigger logs than most equipment in this category. Cooks' sawmills are engineered with significantly more steel than the industry standard, resulting in a heavier, robust sawmill.

"It's one of the most accurate mills out there. It consistently produces precise, reliable material, as long as it is set up properly," says Runquist.

When Runquist first started the business about 16 years ago, he initially operated the AC-36

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portable mill to keep overhead low. For four years, he ran the operation largely on his own, with only occasional assistance from others to stack lumber.

"I'd work most of the day milling and then spend the rest stacking material and preparing loads for delivery to a larger sawmill," explains Runquist. "The physical demands were high, so equipment that minimized unnecessary movement was essential."

When it comes to sawmill design, overall quality is often found in the details. Thoughtfully engineered features can make a significant difference in day-to-day operation, particularly for solo operators.

"When you are younger, the physical work doesn't bother you as much. But as you get older, you start to wish you'd invested a little more upfront in the available features to avoid all the grunt work later," says Runquist.

Log Loading and Positioning

Providing solo operators with the features necessary to streamline operations usually starts with the loading and positioning of large, heavy logs. Hydraulic loaders, turners, and clamps allow a single operator to move logs quickly and accurately into place.

The AC-36 sawmill, which can process timber up to 36" in diameter, is engineered to handle substantial log weights up to 10,000 pounds.

"Their portable sawmills are the best I've seen in terms of lifting capacity, handling up to 10,000 pounds. That is a significant load for a mill, and I've never encountered a log that their cylinders couldn't lift," says Runquist.

Proper log positioning is essential for maximizing cutting efficiency and material yield.

Features such as log turners allow operators to rotate logs into the optimal position, ensuring the widest possible cuts. This system, combined with heavy-duty clamps along with their traditional squaring arms, reduces wear, minimizes the need for frequent adjustments, and supports smoother, more continuous operation.

According to Runquist, "From the moment I see a log as it is placed on the log lift, I am visually analyzing its shape, checking for straightness and irregularities. As it is being lifted and rolled onto the deck [of the sawmill], I'm already planning the best position for cutting."

Since most logs are wider at the base than the top, Runquist positions the narrow end toward the saw head and uses log tapers to lift one end to ensure the center is cut efficiently.

"I can bring up either end of the log to position it exactly where I want it, then clamp it into place before cutting it," says Runquist.

To obtain the widest possible planks, Runquist uses the log turners to rotate oval-shaped logs onto their broadest side. In cases like this, improper positioning would result in significantly narrower boards.

The hydraulic system is engineered for rapid clamp operation, allowing for quick and efficient log handling.

"Once you're familiar with the controls, you save a lot of time setting up and moving to the next log. You're not waiting on hydraulic pressure or for the clamp to move in, out, up, or down—it's just very fast," explains Runquist.

Cutting Speed Control

Another advantage of the AC-36 sawmill is its cutting speed, which enables a solo operator to process logs at an impressively high rate.

"With everything dialed in—sharp blades, track-

ing set correctly, and the right type of wood—you can make cuts as quickly as every 10 seconds, sometimes even faster with softwoods," says Runquist.

For a single operator, cutting and stacking at that pace may not be practical, so the system features adjustable head speed controls to align with varying workflow demands.

According to Runquist, the AC-36 saw head can be set to virtually any speed. This flexibility is invaluable when training new sawyers. Beginners can start in a controlled, slower setting to build confidence, then gradually increase speed as they gain experience. Runquist says that when his sons joined his business, he dialed the speed down to allow them to learn at a slower pace without the risk of damaging equipment.

Today, Troy and his sons at Runquist Sawmill Services have added three additional Cooks sawmills to their operation, as well as other pieces of Cooks equipment.

In addition to the original AC-36, they now have a second AC-3651, as well as a custom built electrically powered AC-4440 which cuts logs up to 44" in diameter and up to 32' long, and a gas powered (Super Wide) SW52 which cuts logs up to 52' in diameter. They also run one of Cooks' larger electric edgers as well as a Cooks Cat Claw band saw blade sharpener and Dual Tooth Setter.

Drag Back Capability

In modern sawmills, a drag-back system enhances efficiency by automatically returning cut lumber to the operator or an outfeed area. Developed in response to customer demand in the 1990s, this innovation has become an industry standard.

After a cut, strategically placed "fingers" engage below the blade as the saw head moves back, pulling the board toward the operator. This allows for easy transfer to a roller bed or trailer, minimizing downtime and operator fatigue.

By employing the drag back fingers, the operator can remain stationary, eliminating unnecessary movement. This feature facilitates efficient material stacking and significantly accelerates production for solo sawyers.

Kevin Casey, founder of Freeport, Florida-based Freeport Sawmill, which specializes in custom sawmilling/woodworking, says "After the cut, the drag back system pulls the cut lumber back so it can be stacked or removed from the machine. You can kick back one board or the whole log after you cut it, and if you have other people helping you, they are busy right away."

A mechanical contractor for over 40 years, Casey founded Freeport Sawmill several years ago. The company operates both a high-capacity production mill and a specialized system designed for cutting large, wide slabs. While capable of standard output, the sawmill is primarily dedicated to specialty and high-end orders rather than conventional production work. According to Casey, Freeport Sawmill embraces complex, custom projects that many others tend to avoid, focusing on delivering high-quality, precision-cut lumber for both industrial and decorative applications.

After purchasing and using a manual mill for the first year, Casey, who is now in his 60s, decided to upgrade to an AC-36 hydraulic mill capable of providing more automated features.

With today's sophisticated sawmills, hydraulic controls are required for loading, turning, and cutting. Unlike sawmills that rely solely on direct-action hydraulics, Cooks sawmills combine hydraulic power with electric-assisted controls. This balanced approach offers the best of both worlds—hydraulic durability with the precision of electric controls—delivering a more efficient, responsive, and powerful sawmill operation.

"I wanted to mill full-time and knew that a fully hydraulic system would ease my workload while improving my production and the quality of my cuts," says Casey.

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Casey is the primary operator of the AC-36 sawmill, and receives assistance with secondary production processes, including kiln drying, stacking, and material preparation. He is supported by an experienced sawyer who also handles cutting.

Casey explains that the AC-36 remains the primary sawmill in the operation; however, increasing demand for wider cuts—specifically for single-piece tabletops, bar tops, and kitchen islands made from large-diameter logs—prompted the purchase of a Super Wide AC-62, Cook's largest mill, approximately two and a half years ago.

"The purchase was made with the expectation that it would prove its value over time, and it has," says Casey. "With the sale of the next large log, the investment will have fully paid for itself."

When working with the Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), Casey appreciates the cost-effectiveness of maintaining the equipment. "With many of their parts readily available, maintaining the sawmills costs much less than comparable equipment," he says.

He has also found the sawmill OEM to be very responsive to any specific needs, even custom requirements.

"They'll custom-build anything, reinforcing it, if needed. If you want a motor beyond the recommended horsepower, they will accommodate that too," says Casey.

By integrating automation, precision engineering, and labor-saving features, portable sawmills offer unmatched efficiency for both single and multi-operator setups. This flexibility ensures consistent, high-quality lumber production, making it a smart investment for both small and high-volume operations.

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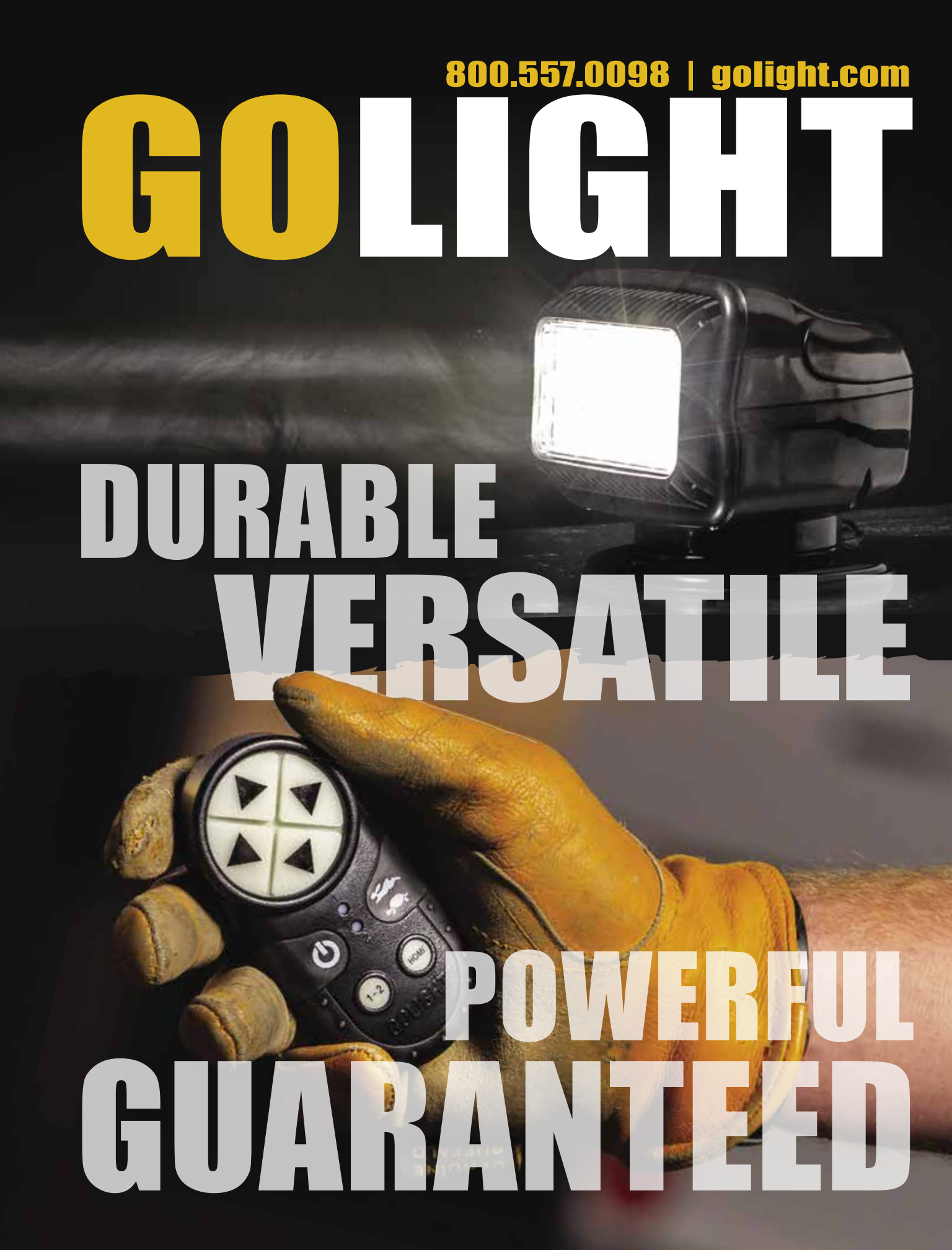

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