



# Patrick F.

**General Manager of**  
Andax Industries

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Interview with **Patrick F. McAtarian**



# McAtarian

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**Andax Industries is celebrating over 40 years in business. In a recent Tech Talk, company co-owner and General Manager, Patrick F. McAtarian talked to us about what it takes to base your success on custom solutions and keep the family-owned business innovative and successful for decades to come.**

**Alan Ross:** Patrick, your company boasts over four decades in the leak-and-spill control, secondary containment and emergency preparedness business. In my previous life, we once had a major oil spill. When I first met you, I didn't know that the remediation system we used to contain that spill was manufactured by Andax Industries. Tell us a little bit about what your company does.

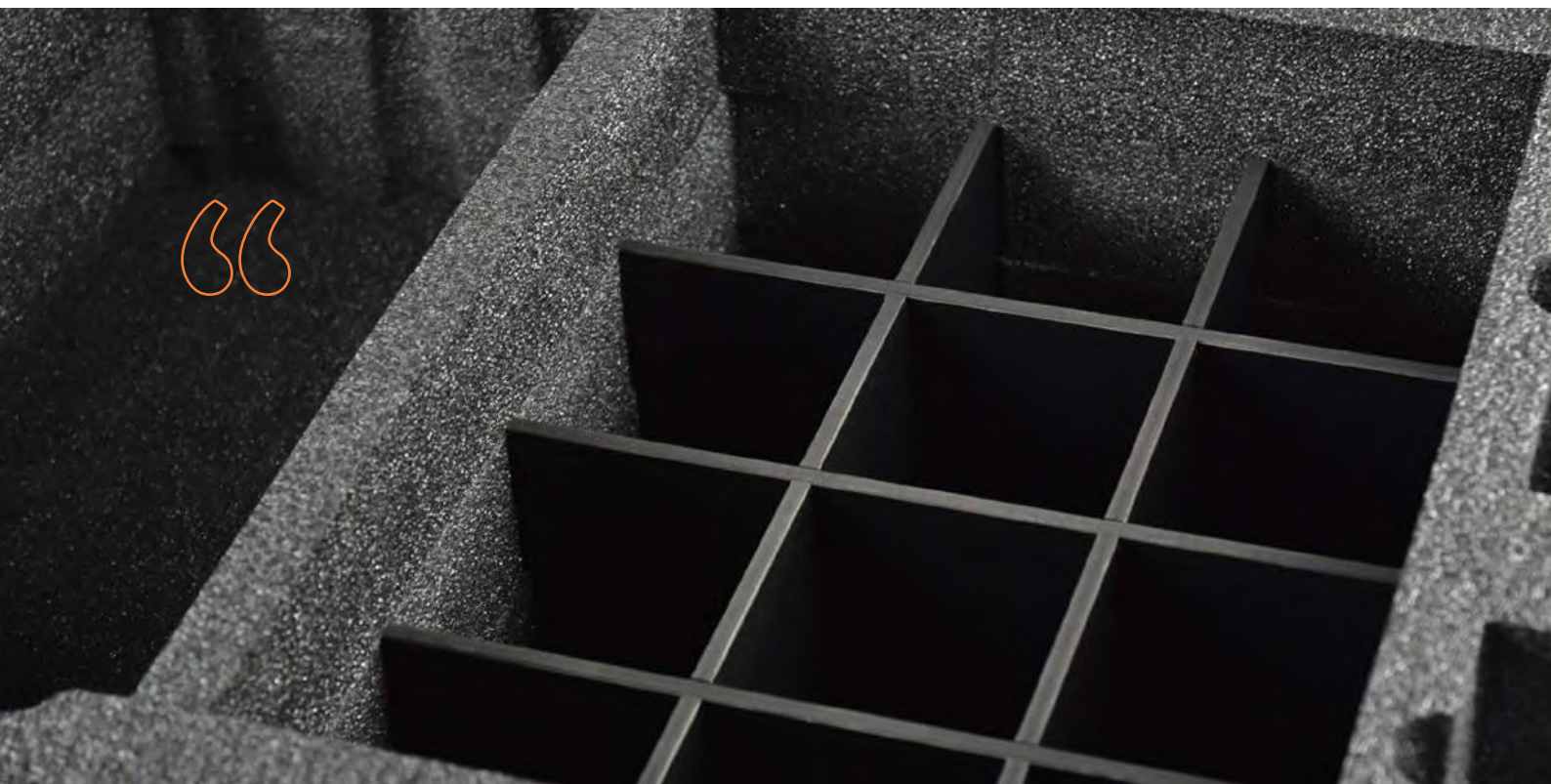
**Patrick McAtarian:** Thank you, Alan. Andax Industries has been in business for over 40 years. I co-own the company with my brother, as General Manager and head bottle washer. At Andax, we focus our energies on the electric utility and industrial markets, providing solutions that customers will not typically find off the shelf. That often involves custom applications that fit customers' particular requirements. We fabricate products and containment systems to meet their particular needs.

**AR** I understand that you produce custom-designed foam packaging for the shipping of electronic or laboratory equipment and other fragile instruments. Is that a special division of the Andax business?

**PM** That is one of the categories of products we offer. We found that our core customer base had many different needs, some of which could be fulfilled from a different perspective. An electric utility, for example, will have a need for testing equipment in order to test transformers for PCBs. To transport the samples needed for analysis and diagnostics, they would typically use a Pelican™ case, lined with anything from plastic wrap to rolled up newspaper. We created a custom case with pre-cut foam to fit the fragile equipment. The foam ensures protection so that the equipment can be dropped off at UPS or FedEx and get to its destination safely.

**AR** I would like to know more about the heart and soul of your business. For privately held companies, companies where owners are involved, we find that vision is critically important to where they are going and how they present themselves to their customers, suppliers and employees. What is your vision for Andax Industries?

**PM** In previous conversations that you and I have had, Alan, I believe we both recognized the fact that there is a transformation



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going on in the electric utility markets and other industries as well. Common knowledge is not as prevalent as it once was. We see that people are not thinking outside the box when trying to solve a particular problem.

Our goal at Andax is to re-educate the customer base on the lessons that have been learned from the past on how to solve a particular issue, for example, how to deal with the leaking pad mounted or overhead transformer. We feel that we are going to be able to provide not only products, but also the methodology to keep utilities and their employees safe and give them the proper tools to do the job right the first time. Our goal is to assist the electric utilities and help the line crews do their job.

**AR** One of the things I love about your approach is that instead of selling a product, you are selling a solution which starts with the problem. You design the solution around the problem.

You have a lot of different solutions, from large scale to smaller scale. All of that must have been created through innovation, the ability to

look at a problem and see how you can solve it in a different way. Tell me a little bit about how you handle innovation.

**PM** One thing that helps with innovation is listening to the customer. We both have a piece of the puzzle. They have the concern, and we potentially have the know-how on the application of materials, structures and engineering in order to address that concern and solve it. That is our focus - listening to the customer. They are the experts in their field and we can apply our knowledge to provide them with a cost-effective solution. For example, there is a lot of new technology coming out, but the majority of transformers out there still have oil in them. For the safety of the line crews, we provide a containment solution that allows them to work safely and efficiently and assure OSHA and DOT compliance.

**AR** Leak repair is a very big issue in some of the older transformers. If oil can get out, then moisture can get in, which deteriorates the transformer. I believe the future is bright for Andax because carbon-based oils are still used to fill most transformers,

especially in North America. What other areas within the electrical system do your products and services apply to?

**PM** We have a wide range of products that address concerns for electric utilities - from overhead pole mounts, through pad mounts, all the way up to substation units - and that makes for some very large containment bags.

One of our claims to fame has been the development of an insulator bushing sac that is designed to allow utility workers to lay down an insulator bushing when they take it out of service. They may be saving it because it is still in good condition and they want to store it for a couple of years, or it may be damaged and needs

to go out for remediation or disposal after being taken down. If they hadn't been leaking already, these bushings usually start to leak when laid down. Our product allows the utility workers to hermetically seal those insulated bushings and ship them out for disposal or storage.

We also have portable containment pools that help contain fluid in case of an accident during transport. A utility truck typically carries over 100 gallons of diesel fuel, 30 to 50 gallons of hydraulic fluid on the vehicle itself plus a radiator. If it gets into an accident, this may create a contamination issue since it usually happens over a storm drain. We provide instant portable systems that a line crew can put underneath a leak in less than three seconds to contain up to 150 gallons.



*We provide portable containment pools that help contain fluid in case of an accident during transport.*

**AR** I believe that the development of these solutions goes back to your vision and what makes you unique. If I were a customer with not just one problem, but with potential problems - how would you engineer a solution for me?

**PM** It goes back to experience which resides in the company. We have had decades of service in the electric utility market and insight into their concerns. Also, listening to the customer and getting what their main priorities are is very important.

Here is an example of a solution we recently designed to help solve the issue of lifting and transporting pole-mount transformers.


In order to make shortcuts to the work methods for lifting and moving pole-mount transformers, some utilities were using bags with straps and flexible intermediate bulk containers (FIBCs), claiming that the process would be DOT and OSHA compliant. DOT is very specific about what you can put into an FIBC, and a transformer is not one of them. FIBCs are designed and tested for materials such as soils, gravel or seeds.

This issue signaled a need in the industry for a change in the way transformers were being contained while lifted and moved. We at Andax Industries listened to our customer base, found out what their primary concerns were and realized that they needed a product that would allow them to contain the transformer while lifting it in a completely OSHA compliant manner, in accordance with the manufacturer's lifting lugs. Using alternative methods such as FIBCs makes for an unstable load, which can potentially cause a failure or a fatality.

We engineered a product that allows the utilities to have complete access to the lifting lugs of the transformer while moving it. We integrated a duffle cover system that allows closing up the transformer when taking it back to the yard, making it weatherproof so it can be stored outside while they are waiting for the transformer repair company or disposal company to come and pick it up, without having to necessarily store it inside. Engineering that solution also involved development of new materials that were not available at the time. Using high tech materials, we developed some unique welding processes



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*We engineered a product that would allow our customers to contain the transformer while lifting it by the manufacturer's lifting lugs and in compliance with OSHA regulations.*

to be able to manufacture the product. In the end, we provided the utility with a compact product that could fit into a storage compartment on a truck, enabling OSHA compliant lifting and containment of the transformer.

**AR** This means your solution also affects safety, which should be the number one concern of every utility. Is there anything else that you would like to share about Andax?

**PM** We are a family-owned company, now led by the second generation. We have been in business for well over 40 years and we plan on being around for another 40, God willing. You only get to do that by providing quality products, answering your customers' concerns and standing behind your product. That is what

we do at Andax every day. We value family, being able to go home at the end of the day. We want to do our part to make sure that our customers can do that as well.

**AR** We at Transformer Technology appreciate the companies that transfer experience and knowledge from one generation to the next. There is a lot of generational change underway in our industry and a lot of talk about how to bring young people into our niche business. It will be interesting to follow Andax as you introduce the next generation of engineered products. Patrick, thank you very much.

**PM** Thank you, Alan. I appreciate the opportunity.