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WARRINGTON, UK, APRIL 26, 2006

# BACnet-capable drives make commissioning easy at Blackburn Hospital

More than 100 ABB HVAC drives are playing a key role in handling the air and water for the new Blackburn Hospital, which is due to receive its first patients in August. The project is the first major building in the UK to use the BACnet communications protocol to control its building services, which has saved significant time during commissioning.

The drives are being used to control motors for the hospital's air handling units and water pumps throughout the site. The ABB HVAC drive is the only one currently on the market with a fully incorporated, or 'native', BACnet capability, which means it does not need to be adapted using add-on software gateways.

The order came from the new hospital's building services contractor Haden Young. Haden Young's control sub-contractor, TAC Satchwell, recommended the BACnet approach in order to make the project run more smoothly.

'BACnet makes the units much easier to commission,' says Neil Lawless, Haden Young's site manager at Blackburn. 'It saves the control specialists from having to spend time inputting gateways to talk to the equipment. BACnet enables the drives to download the settings they need once they're connected.' Instead of taking between two and three hours to set up a drive conventionally, drives equipped with BACnet are ready to go in around 15 minutes.

'We've been commissioning for a couple of weeks now and everything has been going smoothly,' says Lawless. 'BACnet has certainly been a benefit. We'd definitely be looking to gain similar benefits in future projects, although any decision on using BACnet will also depend on which controls specialists we're working with.'

BACnet is already widely used in the US, but is less widespread in the European building sector. Developed by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), BACnet is essentially a set of rules governing the way in which equipment communicates over a computer network. What makes BACnet special is that the rules relate specifically to the needs of building automation and control equipment. For example, they cover issues such as how to ask for the value of a temperature, define a fan-operating schedule, or send a pump status alarm.

In addition to the benefits of BACnet, the ABB drives will also deliver the long-term benefit of improved energy efficiency at the hospital. A variable speed drive reduces the speed of a motor to match demand, dramatically reducing energy costs compared with having the motor working against a throttle, which would be the traditional control solution. In fact, the payback on a variable speed drive is often less than six months in energy savings alone.

The new £125m hospital is being built under the Government's Private Finance Initiative. It will have 668 beds, 14 operating theatres and an accident and emergency department with a special section for children. It will replace outdated facilities for acute care currently provided at Blackburn Royal Infirmary, a Victorian building that has provided patient care in the town since 1865.

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