TESTING THE WATERS

To ensure drinking water safety and peace of mind..

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"We are looking forward to test drinking water in every household and private body in India in the next 5 years. UL's mission in India is to promote safe drinking water by the application of safety science", says Hank Lambert during a recent interaction with EverythingAboutWater. Supporting it further, Dr. Rao affirms, "We have recently come up with the first state-of-the-art testing laboratory in Bengaluru". Excerpts...

Q. How do you intend to contribute in line with UL's 'in India for India' strategy in the water industry? Is your entering the Indian market a global expansion mission with CSR, or is it aimed at achieving numbers and targets?

H. Lambert: We have entered into the Indian market emphasizing on a combination of all of these. It is a part of our global expansion, corporate mission, and water business which includes testing municipal drinking waters, pipes, valves, etc. In 2009, we began to look at global expansion which led us to develop a testing laboratory in Bangalore in India, a country with vast potential. We began developing plans with the help of Mr. Rao to verify performances of water in government municipalities and drinking water purification in various households, hotels, hospitals, etc. With the growing water demand, we see purification of drinking water in India as the most significant opportunity.

Q. What is UL's certification process? Could you elaborate on that for our readers?

H. Lambert: Primarily, there are two services in our certification process: Testing Certification in drinking water, and NSI Standards. Manufacturers send samples to our labs wherein we test them on various parameters. If they pass, we certify them, if they do not; the manufacturers fail to get the certification of UL.

Q. How long have you been in the certification field and how did you get started?

H. Lambert: We laid the foundation of water testing in US 20 years ago. We developed capabilities through our highly experienced and technically sound engineers and experts. We have come up with water and water equipments testing laboratory in Bangalore in India recently.

Q. Would you say that "safety" is at the core of UL's activities?

H. Lambert: Absolutely, our mission is to provide safety science for people around the world. We began in the year 1897 with safety testing for electrical appliances and then treaded further with fire equipments, chemicals testing, other equipments, etc.

Q. Why should a manufacturer choose third party verification?

H. Lambert: Basically, there are two reasons that make a manufacturer invest in third party verification. Firstly, it is market access in countries like USA, Europe, Japan, middle-east, and parts of Asia where third party verification is held compulsory by local authorities. Secondly, investing in third parties gives consumers' confidence on products of such manufacturers which is ultimately profitable to them itself. We help manufacturers to develop and test their product performances. Therefore, we help customers with services to help them access worldwide markets and enhance their overall product competitiveness. And now manufactures can rely on the fact that our labs are NABL accredited.

Q. What kind of support can an applicant expect from UL during UL certification process?

H. Lambert: We make an applicant get involved in our certification process from the very early stage. We also provide consulting and advisory in product development process in the product development tests. We work with manufacturers from the conceptualization stage of the product which makes us a part of their technological development and R&D facility. In case the product fails to pass the test, we support the applicant by suggesting him solutions required to modify the product. We also cater the applicants with information on global market as to what certifications they need to further foster in their business.

"In India, there needs to be strict government regulations that each municipality should supply tested water."

Q. How does UL mark help product manufacturers in demonstrating compliance with recognized standards?
H. Lambert: UL mark builds strong reputation which makes manufacturers very confident about their products' high standards of safety. UL is trusted globally with more than 117 years of expertise across industries, although UL's venture into food and water business is from past 20 years only.

Q. When a manufacturer gets a UL mark, can he print UL label on the package of a UL listed product?
H. Lambert: Yes. Once approved, a manufacturer can very well print the UL label on his product. But then, we are very strict with the use of UL mark. If there are any further modifications in a tested product, they need to re-test it before printing it with a UL mark.

Q. What are your core strengths that set you apart from other established companies in quality certification?
H. Lambert: The fact that we get engaged with our customers from very early stage is one of our core strengths which set us far apart from other established companies. Moreover, our customer service is superior to all existing ones. Most importantly, our turnaround time is most competitive parameter which creates an edge over others for us.

Q. Please shed some light on the Water Quality Check Program.
H. Lambert: In US, our program constitutes of taking a sample from the applicant, perform tests as per EPA standards, for contaminants such as arsenic, bacteria, etc. This is followed by providing the test reports to the concerned authorities. In India too, we follow the same procedure. But here in India, there are no government regulations that each municipality should supply tested water.

Q. What are the benefits for Indian water product industry?
H. Lambert: The core benefit lies in the confidence that people can get through our drinking water testing. We ensure drinking water safety to our consumers. We are also developing programs to test samples from households, hospitals, and other private bodies.

Q. Where do you see India in your global business strategy?
H. Lambert: India is the most important market for us right now. We have started in a very small way and hope to achieve big in the near future. Presently, we are also providing services to Europe, China, and other major markets like middle-east.

Q. Which are the key market segments in the market where you see a majority of your business coming in the future?
H. Lambert: In India, we are looking forward to the testing of water purifiers, filters, pipes, valves, etc. We are also planning for water testing opportunities in the households and other private bodies, as I mentioned before.

Q. Tell us about some of the new things that have been happening or new services you are going to introduce.

H. Lambert: We are currently developing a standard for drinking water service. We are also constantly developing new technologies for microbiology. Food testing is another sector which we are looking forward to enter in India.

Q. How do you plan to create awareness about your services?
H. Lambert: To create awareness, we are organizing campaigns all over. We spread messages through both print and digital trade media about our services and have direct mails and e-mailers, e-mail campaigns to the specific target groups of our existing and new customers. Our appearances in the international conferences and expos are a part of our customer awareness and education program.

Q. What are some of your key future plans and where do you see UL in the next 5 year time frame?
H. Lambert: Some of our key future plans include very active service testing in the municipals, housing societies, and other public sectors of Asia and Middle East region. We are also hoping for a significant larger business throughout Asia and middle-east in the next 5 years.

Q. Tell us something about your Bangalore testing laboratory.
Dr. Rao: UL laboratory caters to product safety certification for water treatment chemicals, components like pipes, pipe fittings, valves, gaskets, etc. Certification of these products involves, auditing and testing for toxic materials. Once product conforms to relevant standard, UL will allow manufacturer to use 'UL' logo on their product, which means that product is safe to use in drinking water applications. We also test removal efficiency of point-of-use water purification systems for bacteria, virus and cyst. The equipments in the lab which are used for this certification are GC MS, Atomic Absorption Spectrometer, TOC Analyzer, Spectrophotometer, etc.

Q. What is the turnaround for your laboratory to produce a report?
Dr. Rao: In general, for certification of components takes 8 - 12 weeks. Some of the components, we need to expose for 3 weeks with test water and analyze the exposed water for toxic chemicals. Certification process includes information collection, formulation review, exposure, analysis & toxicological review of the data.

Q. What are the distinct capabilities of your laboratory that create an edge for you?
Dr. Rao: Our lab is capable of testing around 170 parameters in water, which includes inorganics, volatile and semi volatile organic compounds and microbiological parameters. Our chemists and microbiologists acknowledge rich experience in this area and have invaluable knowledge. Our lab is accredited by NABL as per ISO/IEC 17025.

Q. Tell us about some of your new innovations or services.
Dr. Rao: We perform Risk Assessment for water purification systems for electrical and water safety. We also assist the manufacturers of water purifiers for 'CE' marking for their product. We do gap analysis audits for packaged drinking water manufacturers.