



Contact: Rick Lewis
GS&F
(615) 385-1100
rlewis@gsandf.com

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SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT IMPROVES LIGHTING PERFORMANCE AND SAFETY WITH EHID BALLASTS

Retrofit Project at Seven-Story Parking Garage Includes 1,500 New Ballasts from Universal Lighting Technologies

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (November 2, 2011) – It sounds like the start of a Hollywood thriller. It's the dead of night in the middle of a parking garage. All is quiet. Suddenly a light fixture explodes, shattering car windows. The audience jumps, wondering what happens next. In a movie, it might be exciting. But when seven lighting fixtures exploded in a parking garage at the San Francisco airport, facility management was understandably concerned about public safety.

Enter Bill Lehew, head airport electrician. He determined that the explosions were caused by the 100-watt quartz metal halide ballast in each fixture overloading. Therefore, every ballast in the entire seven-floor parking structure would need to be replaced. "The entire fixtures were self-destructing," said Lehew. "We couldn't risk the possibility of injuries, so we took action throughout the building."

Lehew recognized that an eHID ballast would provide the safety and dependability that the airport needed. Working with Omega Pacific Electrical Supply, Inc., Lehew identified eHID ballasts from Universal Lighting Technologies as an ideal fit for the job.

Electronic High Intensity Discharge (or eHID) ballasts can significantly reduce energy use and monthly operating costs in a broad range of applications such as warehouses, big-box retail stores, factories, manufacturing facilities, schools, and parking lots. The Universal line of eHID ballasts are designed for metal halide lamps ranging from 20 to 210 watts, with energy savings up to 17 percent compared to magnetic HID ballasts.

However, energy savings was not the motivating factor behind the San Francisco Airport project. Instead, the primary concern was installing a ballast that could safely handle the electrical capacity of the fixture and would automatically shut down without damage in the event of a malfunction.

To that end, Lehew worked closely with the engineering team at Universal Lighting Technologies. He shipped one of the garage's lighting fixtures to the Universal engineers, who conducted comprehensive tests to ensure the proper performance of the Universal eHID ballast in the conditions demanded by the customer. The engineers also demonstrated where to install heat sinks for optimal performance.

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“I was taken aback by the level of service they provided,” said Lehw. “I’ve never seen a giant company offer such a personal touch. The engineers at Universal Lighting went above and beyond the call of duty to be helpful.”

The retrofit project began in August 2010 and was completed in about one month. The garage remained in operation during the installation. All told, new eHID ballasts were installed in 1,500 fixtures. This included the fixtures in lobbies and staircases as well as parking areas. “The installation process went smoothly. We were very satisfied,” said Lehw.

Not only did the new Universal eHID ballasts provide the safety and dependability that were the primary goals of the project, but there were valuable secondary benefits as well. Previously, light levels had been inconsistent from fixture to fixture, creating uneven illumination throughout the parking garage. This problem has been resolved with the new eHID ballasts. Each fixture now performs identically to all of the others, casting equal light.

“What’s that called, an unintended consequence?” said Lehw. “In this case the unintended consequences were entirely positive. Lighting consistency is way up. Every fixture now provides the same light.”

The second phase of the project was to replace fixtures with magnetic ballasts and auxiliary lighting controls. Facility management chose Universal’s exclusive “JA” series ballast, which has all ballast and auxiliary lighting control functions integrated into one standard size enclosure. The “JA” ballasts provided the required safety as well as cost savings, reduced assembly labor (only one device to mount), and offered a significantly smaller footprint than magnetic versions.

Due to the initial success of the parking garage retrofit project, the San Francisco Airport is now evaluating additional areas for potential conversion to eHID ballasts.

Universal Lighting Technologies assumed control of Vossloh-Schwabe’s North American operations in February 2010, becoming the number-one provider of eHID ballasts in the United States. Contractors, distributors, and other lighting professionals can visit Universal’s award-winning e-Learning Center at www.unvlt.com to take online courses in eHID technology and other areas.

For more than six decades, Universal Lighting Technologies, Inc., has been bringing power and precision to the world’s most innovative lighting. Headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., with operations and distribution worldwide, the products of Universal Lighting Technologies are marketed under the Universal® and Triad® brand names. A subsidiary of Panasonic Electric Works Co., Ltd., and a member of the Panasonic Group, Universal Lighting Technologies is focused on designing, manufacturing, and distributing the industry’s finest lighting ballasts and controls. Universal Lighting Technologies — *Energy Intelligence in Lighting.*