



Blue Buffalo Richmond Indiana Plant



## HOW TO BUILD AN AWARD-WINNING LUBRICATION PROGRAM

Blue Buffalo lubrication team  
(Left to right) Matt Felix, Kevin Keith

### Overview

Blue Buffalo, now a brand within the General Mills family, first opened the doors of its 450,000 square-foot Richmond, Indiana plant in June 2019. Management knew that for the plant to be competitive, they needed a strong reliability culture and a focus on proactive maintenance and lubrication.

*“ I learned a lot about the right way to do things from the training with Noria. ”*

*– Matt Felix, Lubrication Technician*

### Training and On-site Services

Addressing the increased demand for pet food in recent years, Megan Johnson, Plant Manager at Blue Buffalo asserted, “[Situations like] COVID puppies are a totally real phenomenon... we can only meet increases in demand by proactively maintaining our equipment. Our lube guys and the program we have here truly are a competitive advantage for us.”

Those lube guys are Matt Felix and Kevin Keith. While Matt and Kevin did not start their careers with a focus on lubrication, it quickly became their bread and butter. Noria has been a source of knowledge and support for both of them during this process through training and onsite services.

### Roadmap to Success

When Noria helps a plant make improvements to its lubrication program, they follow a three-phase approach of assessment, design and implementation.

Phase one, the Ascend™ Assessment, is a three-day process in which a Noria expert walks the plant, capturing details of current lubrication practices and procedures. Then they deliver a complete report, which includes a strategic plan designed to help the plant achieve both quick wins and long-term success along with an overall score.

Once Blue Buffalo’s assessment was complete, it became much clearer where the lube program was going and how Noria would help make it happen.

## Learning & Preparing

When Blue Buffalo called Noria, they were in the process of designing and building the plant. Before machines were installed, they worked with Noria to ensure that the right inspections, contamination control activities and lubrication procedures would be in place from day one of operations. Over the course of a year, Noria visited the Richmond site six times to identify lubrication points, document procedures and train staff on best practices.

"I learned a lot about the right way to do things from the training with Noria," Matt said.

"Where I came from before Blue Buffalo, it was just: 'throw some oil in it,' or 'throw some grease on it,' it didn't necessarily matter what oil or what grease, as long as it had something in it."

But through Noria's training courses, Matt has come a long way since those days, having successfully achieved MLT I, MLT II, MLA I, MLA II, and MLA III certifications to supplement what he learned through Noria's lubrication program development process.

## Lubrication Equipment & Machine Modifications

With the assessment complete and the roadmap in hand, it was time to start modifying equipment, installing breathers, sight glasses and other improvements that drive reliability.

Additionally, a new lube storage room was equipped with all the necessary components:

- Temperature control system
- Labeling system
- Separation of food-grade and non-food-grade lubricants (and associated hardware)
- Oil Safe systems to prefilter "new" oil
- Storage cabinets

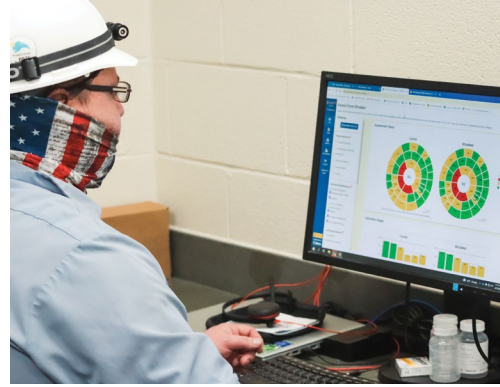
"With it being organized and everything labeled, it definitely makes it faster and easier to find what you need," Matt said.

"And you're sure of what you're doing too," adds Kevin.

Without clear and easy-to-read labels, lubricant mixing and misapplication run rampant in most plants, leading to unplanned downtime and potentially requiring an entire oil system to be drained, flushed and refilled.

*"With the Noria Assessment, we just follow it like a roadmap to lead us to a better place."*

*- Kevin Keith, Lubrication Technician*



## Winning the John R. Battle Award

Blue Buffalo's Richmond plant applied for the 2021 John R. Battle Award for lubrication excellence, showcasing their dedication to best practices and continuous improvement.

The plant was recognized as the winner of the award at Noria's Reliable Plant Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in October of 2021.

According to Megan, the award did more than just recognize their contributions to the success of the plant - it also brought more awareness to the company as a whole to the importance of lubrication.

"If you don't 'grow up' around lubrication in your career, you kind of take it for granted. It's easy to just assume someone is out there doing it - it's very much an unsung hero of reliability, so once we heard what Matt and Kevin were being recognized for, it was shouting it from the rooftops from there on."

## Advice for Others

We asked both Kevin and Matt about the advice they would give to others who are looking to build and sustain a successful lubrication program. For plants who are getting started developing a world-class program, Matt recommends starting by looking at asset criticality. Assess your most critical assets and prioritize improvements from there. Try to demonstrate a quick win by fixing an issue with one or two machines and share the results with the team to get buy-in on larger improvement projects.

Kevin recommends modifying important gearboxes with breathers, sample ports, color-coded stickers, column sight glasses and the rest so that operators, inspectors and lubrication teams can catch warning signs earlier and avoid contamination or accidental lubricant mixing.

The Blue Buffalo Richmond plant continues to achieve reliability improvements through their dedication to lubrication best practices and hopes to encourage other plants to do the same.

"We know this is just the start of the celebration - not the finish line," Megan told us. "While we are a 450,000 square-foot operation today, in the near future we will be significantly larger - and it's because of the foundation these guys have built that enables us to make those investments and continue our reliability journey."

**For more on Noria's Lubrication Program Development, contact us at 800-597-5460 or visit [noria.com](http://noria.com).**



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