

Automotive Focus Group Launches e-Learning Module for Automotive Refinish Industry

By Chuck Cameron, Mike Dvorchak and Brad Richards

With the opening of RadTech 2008, the Automotive Focus Group is pleased to announce the launching of an interactive Web-based training module for use in the automotive repair/refinish industry. RadTech has partnered with Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair (I-CAR), the recognized training expert in the repair/refinish industry, to prepare this state-of-the-art module. It provides sound, fundamental training in using UV-A curable coatings in this industry without requiring the technician to travel to an off-site location and away from the busy bodyshop.

The Road to Web-Based Training

Why did the Automotive Focus Group take this step? The focus group's basic mission has been to educate the potential practitioners of UV-A curable coatings in all portions of the automotive industry. Because of the limited number of automotive manufacturing firms, decision-makers are easily reached through personal visits, seminars and discussion forums. The thousands of small businesses engaged in post-delivery touchup and reconditioning after accidents cannot be reached so readily.

As soon as the first coatings became available to the refinish industry, the focus group recognized the need for consistent training, especially for the safe use of UV-A equipment. The first deliverable was the *Refinish UV-A Safety Guide*, now available both in print and electronic form, which clearly addresses the questions that come with any new technology. This guide became a standardized reference for equipment and coating suppliers as they conducted awareness training for their customers.

The Refinish Subcommittee of the focus group continued the mission of education by preparing a concerted presentation for the NACE 2003. In 2004, presentations were supplemented with demonstrations on the convention floor. It soon became apparent that to maximize the exposure in this industry the focus group needed to align with the leader in technician education. From this, the Focus Group made refined presentations during seminars at I-CAR's annual meetings in 2004 and 2005, as well as supporting RadTech's booth on the NACE convention floor since 2004.

Why I-CAR?

Like RadTech, I-CAR is a not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to the continuing education of body shop

technicians in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). I-CAR organizes and coordinates seminars and clinics across the U.S. and Canada to demonstrate and teach proper techniques for all aspects of the body repair process. Its primary mission is education, always with a strong, upfront emphasis on safety. Auto manufacturers turn to I-CAR to help them establish repair processes for new models that will return the vehicle to pre-collision integrity. I-CAR knows this industry and is known as a positive resource in this industry.

Primary contact for I-CAR instructors with students is still face-to-face in classroom and application training centers. However, I-CAR has embraced electronic media to deliver high-quality training, even when the technician cannot afford to be away from the shop for traditional classroom instruction. In the last few years, I-CAR has been converting a portion of the classroom training to online modules. In this new system, I-CAR professionally produces all of the content and manages the web servers used so that the technician can receive proper continuing education credits when they have successfully completed a course and the related proficiency testing.

Once the focus group leadership became aware of I-CAR's e-learning modules, discussions began on how to bring all parties together. Cooperatively building a communication tool of this magnitude is a first for RadTech and I-CAR. Once the scope and costs were agreed on, I-CAR prepared a very aggressive timeline with action steps that assured completion of the full module well in advance of RadTech 2008.

Members of the Automotive Focus Group stepped up to volunteer products to use and started to canvas other RadTech members and non-member

suppliers alike for other products. Everyone contacted was informed of the requirements—products used must come from RadTech member companies and must be available in the NAFTA marketplace by Spring 2008 when the module would be released. In order to be included in this exciting event, a few companies and individuals decided to join RadTech, expanding the focus group and further validating the group's mission. I-CAR prepared professional video clips and still photography to accompany the training script. Focus group members reviewed these images.

The end product is an excellent module for I-CAR's portfolio of online training for body shop technicians. The module opens with a review of RadTech's mission and with references to RadTech's Web site and to sites for many member companies that may be known to the audience. The training proceeds to outline the curing process for UV-A cured coatings and how this differs from more conventional coatings. Naturally this leads to a solid discussion of safety, both general shop safety, as well as specific to UV-A curing equipment and the coating materials. Before moving on to specific training on layers of the coating repair process, the module includes a review and testing of the theory to assure comprehension.

The balance of the module leads the technician through application and processing of glazing filler (putty), primer/surfacer (delivered from aerosol container or for application by conventional spray gun) and clearcoat (1K or 2K 'hybrid'). At each stage, the safety precautions are reiterated and the technician is redirected to review the specific recommendations made by the supplier of the products that are used.

Throughout the product training, the economic and environmental

benefits in time and waste reduction of UV-A curing systems are presented. The training closes with a review of the specific application steps. In order to be credited for completing the course, the technician must pass a final test. Once complete, the module remains open to the technician so that he or she may reference the information at a later date. And should more products become available to this industry, RadTech and I-CAR will update this module to keep the training fresh and pertinent. Although directed to technicians in body shops, the module may prove as valuable for insurance adjusters or application technicians on an auto assembly line where UV-A curable coatings are being considered.

Conclusion

In summary, the Automotive Focus group has taken a giant step forward in delivering a uniform training message to thousands of potential customers by linking to a respected training agency in the automotive repair world. This 'One Voice' for the industry solidifies the message and reinforces the image that UV curing is a technology for today and tomorrow. ▀

—Chuck Cameron is a consultant; Mike Dvorchak is technical manager, Bayer MaterialScience; and Brad Richards is manager, Automotive Refinish Coatings R&D, BASF. The authors are active members of RadTech's Automotive Focus Group.