Watertight installations in a flash

DEKS was established in Melbourne, Australia in 1947 and created the first and original rubber roof flashing. Its focus was on creating, manufacturing and distributing leading brands within the roofing, drainage and plumbing industries ever since. Now, the company is applying its roofing knowledge to the solar market to provide protection and efficiency for domestic and commercial installations. PES was keen to learn more from Business Development Manager Martin Hipkin.

PES: Welcome to PES for what I hope will be an insightful interview Martin. DEKS has been innovating in the world of roof flashings for several decades now, hasn't it? How was the move into solar PV and thermal made?

Martin Hipkin: As the business development manager here at DEKS, I'm pleased to join you for this interview. Our move into solar PV and thermal was a natural progression. We've been at the forefront of the roof flashing industry for decades, and our experience with sealing and protecting roof penetrations made us uniquely positioned to move into the solar sector. As solar technology evolved, we saw an opportunity to apply our expertise in roof flashings to ensuring the watertight safe and secure installation of solar array cable and pipe entries.

PES: This is a market that has really taken off in recent years; how has DEKS been able to respond to increased demand?

MH: We have been able to respond to the increased demand due to our strong global manufacturing capabilities, a robust supply chain, and an extensive customer base and distribution network across the UK and Europe. Our longstanding relationships with distributors and customers have allowed us to effectively scale up our operations to meet this growing need. In addition, we have invested heavily in research and development to ensure we're offering innovative and high-quality solutions for the evolving solar market.

PES: The domestic market is particularly strong and growing rapidly right now, are you seeing this reflected in your business?

MH: Absolutely. The growing interest in sustainable energy solutions has led to a surge in the domestic market for solar installations. We've seen a huge uptake in orders for our products related to residential solar installations.

PES: How are you able to help in the domestic solar arena?

MH: We see three markets here with PV in-roof, on-roof and thermal. We provide purpose-made solutions for all solar pipe and cable penetrations. Also, our extremely popular product DEKS Fast Flash which is designed to flash the abutment between panel mounting modules and the roof tiles. When an array is fitted in-roof all you see is the panel, the roof tiles and the flashing. Contractors have been able to set the highest standards with aesthetics and performance. Speed of fitting is a massive bonus and ensuring the job looks amazing with no leaks.

Our range of roof flashings are designed to ensure a seamless and secure integration of solar technology into a home. By using our products, homeowners can have peace of mind knowing that their solar installation is watertight and structurally sound, thereby protecting their investment in solar technology and their home.

PES: What kind of challenges are you able to overcome with your products and solutions?

MH: Our dual-purpose products help overcome a variety of challenges. Cable penetrations through roofs can be a point of danger and leaks, ensuring a safe entry point ensures the installation will not prematurely fail, eliminating the risk of house fires that

Martin Hipkin

can be caused by pushing cables under tiles, which was common practice until recently.

Ensuring solar installations are watertight and able to withstand the elements is another challenge. Our experience in the roofing industry means we understand the challenges of integrating solar technology with existing roof structures, and we've designed our solutions for contractors to eliminate risk. Simply put, why risk not using a flashing? It's certainly easier and cheaper to fit one, than fix the failure. At DEKS we say fit and forget!

PES: Talk us through your most recent products.

MH: Our most recent products include the SolarDek HookFlash and the SolarDek PanelDrain. The HookFlash is a solution for weatherproofing solar panel hooks on mostly slate type roofs. It's made from high-quality materials that offer superior protection against water penetration and leaks, ensuring that your roof and home stay safe and dry. HookFlash is easy to install and provides a secure seal that can withstand harsh weather conditions. This not only offers you peace of mind, but also contributes to the overall longevity of your solar installation.

The SolarDek PanelDrain is another innovative product we have recently introduced. It is a water drain clip designed to enhance solar panel performance by eliminating water and dust and silt accumulation, making it perfect for low-tilt installations. Its adaptable design ensures compatibility with all frame sizes. Notably, PanelDrain is made from a flexible and recyclable material, promoting an eco-friendly and sustainable approach to solar panel maintenance. Built to last, it's made from high-quality, automotive-grade plastic that is UV protected and resistant to temperatures up to 105°C, ensuring long-lasting durability and performance.

Additionally, its unique anti-clog design prevents dust accumulation, further contributing to the overall system performance and efficiency. With PanelDrain, you can quickly protect and optimise your solar investment, ensuring maximum performance and longevity and less costly maintenance.

PES: What advantages do these bring, compared to competitive alternatives?

MH: One of the key advantages of our products is their versatility. They're designed to work with all solar panel types and mounting systems, making them a flexible choice for many different installation scenarios. Additionally, our products are incredibly durable and designed to last, ensuring that once solar panels are installed, they stay secure and protected.

PES: Ensuring the installation is watertight and reliable is really important, how straightforward are these products to fit?

MH: As we say, it's cheaper and wiser to fit a flashing than fix a leak. Indeed, ensuring the installation is watertight and reliable is of utmost importance to us. To that end, we've designed our SolarDek range of flashings, to be as straightforward to fit as possible. Let me walk you through a brief overview of the process:

When installing a SolarDek flashing, first work out where you want the flashing and cables and pipes to enter the property. Make a hole large enough to pass through safely without contact with any sharp edges and or allowing for expansion, position it over the area where the pipe or cable will penetrate the roof.

All our flashings are flexible and easily form to every roof profile. We supply everything you will need too, sealants and screws for 'sheet roofs', the sealant applied to the interface of both materials and screws then clamp down firm creating a watertight seal. 'Tiled roof flashings' are pushed under the upper tiles and over the side and bottom tiles, hand moulded to the tile profile water runs over it with no special fixings required. To finish, you simply pass cables or pipes through the rubber portals to create a safe watertight and permanent seal.

Throughout this entire process, we provide detailed instructions to make it as easy as possible. And of course, if there are any questions or concerns, our customer support team is always on hand to assist. Ultimately, our goal is to make the installation process straightforward.

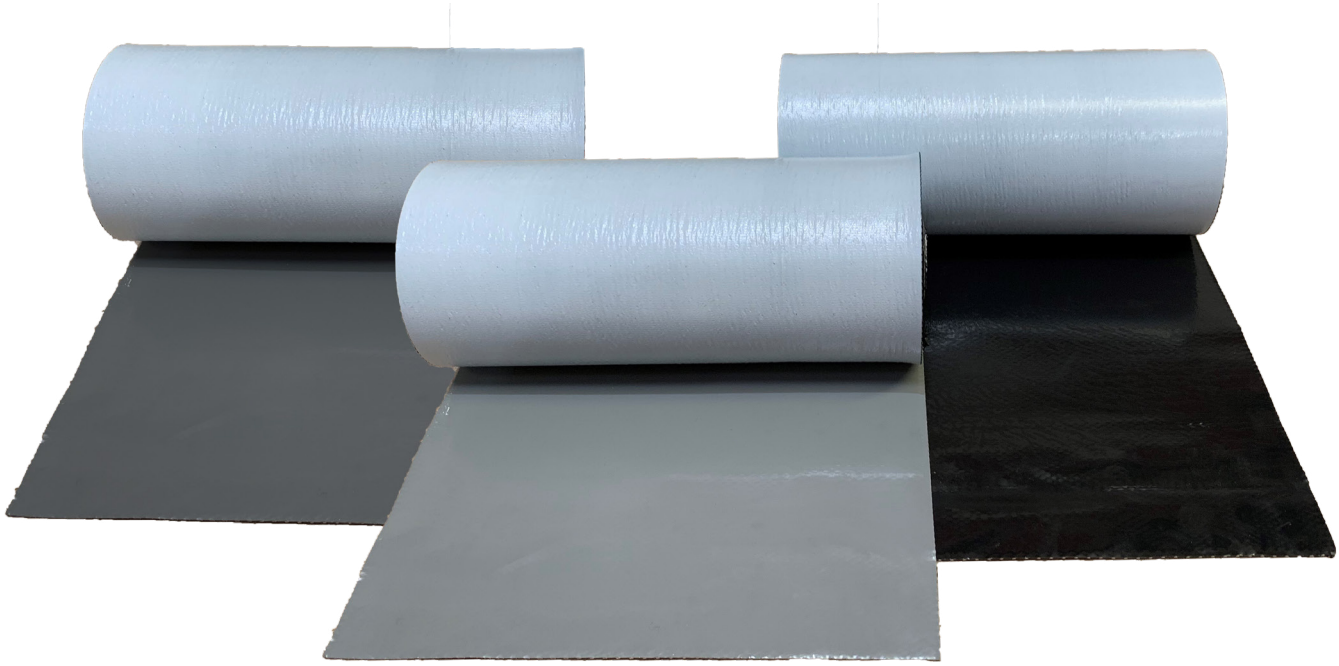
PES: What kind of quality assurance can you offer your customers?

MH: We stand by the quality of our products. They all go through rigorous testing to ensure they meet our high standards. We offer a warranty on our products and have a dedicated customer service team available to address any concerns or issues. For 70+ years our flashings have been installed in every continent in the world, and we like to think we have come across every issue possible.

PES: Aside from the domestic market, you also offer solutions for flat roof installations, is that correct?

MH: Yes, we are currently working with an exciting concept from Scandinavia for flat roof installations, which have been described by contractors as a game changer. It's a complete non-ballast waterproof solar panel mounting option. Any contractor fitting flat roof arrays can benefit from this. Over half a million installations of this product are successfully installed in Scandinavia and Europe. This is an extremely exciting step for us into roof mounting systems, but a natural one to include waterproofing too.

PES: This is predominantly for commercial buildings, isn't it?



MH: The commercial sector is very strong and growing. You need products that maximise the potential for solar and reduce weight on roofs not designed initially for these loads, so it is an issue. Our roof console system eliminates heavy additional non-active generation points. More bang for your buck and with reduced risk.

PES: How do the challenges differ between the two markets?

MH: The commercial sector is less bespoke; there are a myriad of roof types and construction methods to tackle. The ability to supply a product that has multiple purposes is crucial. Installing solar panels becomes more difficult and specification heavy. Loads from the elements have to be factored in, as arrays tend to be much larger than domestic and more exposed. We see eliminating weight as a crucial step and we have a fantastic solution, with no risk of compromising the integrity of flat roof membranes. We will be demonstrating this at Solar Storage Live in October and contractors interested in our game changer can contact us now.

PES: Are you working on any new products you can tell us about today?

MH: While I can't divulge specifics, I can share that we're constantly looking at ways to innovate and improve. We're currently exploring new materials and designs to enhance the efficiency and durability of our products. Stay tuned for some exciting developments in the near future!

PES: What do you think the future of solar PV and thermal will be, domestically and commercially?

MH: The future of solar PV and thermal is bright, both domestically and commercially. We're seeing a global shift towards renewable energy sources, and solar technology is at the forefront of this change. Domestically, we expect to see more homes adopting solar energy as it becomes increasingly affordable and efficient and mandatory. On the commercial side, the drive for sustainability and cost savings will continue to spur growth in solar installations.

As for DEKS, we are excited to continue innovating and offering solutions that help our customers harness the power of the sun.

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