

Commercial growth with phase-out

One Sydney contractor is finding plenty of work in preparing commercial clients for the R22 phase-out, Phillip Ross reports.

Five years is not a long time for change as dramatic as the phasing out of R22 in air conditioning and refrigeration systems, according to James & Scott Air managing director Scott Dredge.

Speaking at the opening of the company's new premises in Sydney's west, Dredge says the Australian Government's commitment to phasing out consumption of HCFCs by 2016 is a major game-changer.

"Over the next five years we have got to prepare ourselves, to prepare our technology and where we are going," Dredge says. "We will have to convert these R22 air conditioners and refrigerators to R410A and it is going to effect virtually every one of us."

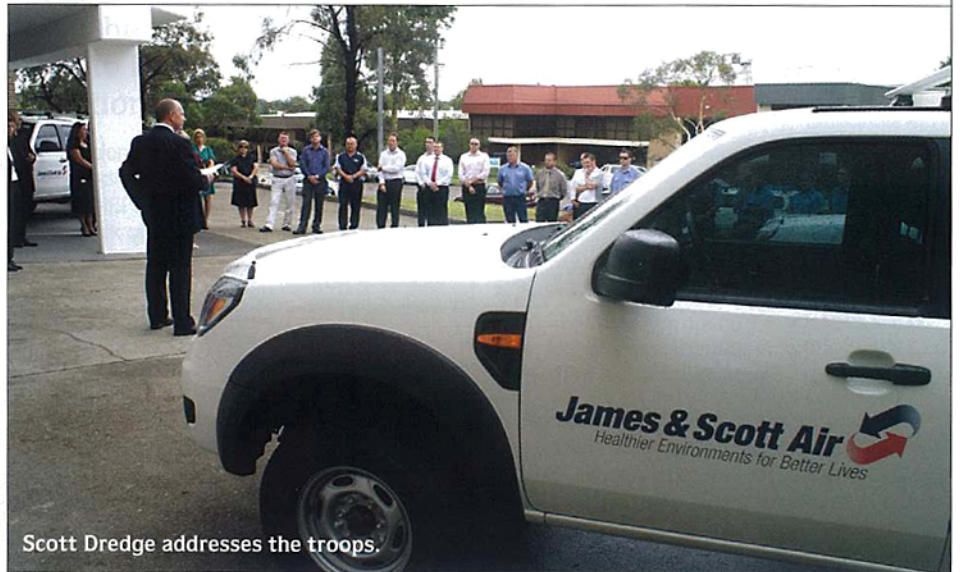
James & Scott Air started out in a shed at the back of a house 16 years ago. "My new office is larger than that whole workshop," beams a proud Dredge during a tour of the 800m² Seven Hills headquarters.

"I'm passionate about two things in my life – heating and cooling. I'm born and bred refrigeration. It's what I know. It's all I've done as a business.

"I've had the luxury of going from an apprentice to being a technician to a supervisor to a manager and business owner."

The company now employs 42 technicians including 13 apprentices and 40 to 50 sub contractors, with a total of 63 on the payroll.

Dr Jim Taggart, managing director of the Taggart Group, added his congratulations to



Scott Dredge addresses the troops.

Dredge, his wife Paula, who is a director of the company, and their team.

"To see what has transformed in 17 years is fantastic. You're growing at an incredible rate. This couple has an entrepreneurial spirit, they have a dream to succeed."

With the increased warehouse space the company can now pre-order upcoming jobs and set equipment aside ready for when approval is given. It has in place the Woolworths NSW air conditioning service and maintenance contract and works all over NSW and Australia.

An office in Brisbane is coming, along with either Wollongong, Melbourne or Canberra, Dredge says. "We are major players and can solve a lot of problems, a little bit like sleeping giants."

He says not enough is happening in Australia with regard to the R22 phase-out. 2011 sees

the quota dropped by 75 per cent from the base year. To put this in perspective, his combined customer base uses just over 2000kg of the gas per year and there are 14,000 air conditioning companies across the nation – plenty of work for contractors.

"We have a responsibility to inform people now and provide them with the information that they need to make cost-efficient long-term decisions. The sooner that they plan a phase-in of new refrigerants the better it will be without a last-minute rush."

One of their clients includes Blacktown City Council which has promised to be carbon neutral by 2025. James & Scott Air is working with the council to reach that target including solar thermal air conditioning and retrofitting chillers across the large facility base.

Taggart noted that the company web site claims 'honesty, integrity and fair play' for its clientele and employees and the new facility provides that flexibility. Technicians have their own alarm control so they can deactivate at any time of the week and get what they want from the warehouse to service customers.

Unlike residential contractors, Dredge says they also make sure their designs are the best suited to the application, "because we are commercial we don't have the luxury of being tied to one supplier."

"We like to use Actron Air, (founders) the Mundys were prepared to take a risk on us and gave us our first units on credit so I stick by them, but we have to design to suit the application so we look at all suppliers that best suit."

The company currently does 95 per cent service and five per cent new construction, "but with the pick-up in the economy we are working on our new construction clients, he says.

Dredge only sees the positive. "I'm only 42 so there is plenty of time."



Left to right: Jim Taggart, Scott Dredge, Paula Dredge.