SIEMENS

LEVEL MATTERS
Did you know?

Transducer Installation: The Known Knowns, Known Unknowns, and Unknown Unknowns

When it comes to transducer installation, we deal with *known knowns*—best practices that should be followed but often aren't. We also face known unknowns, where issues are expected but not fully understood, and unknown unknowns, where problems only reveal themselves under changing conditions.

Many users abandon ultrasonic sensors for radar, blaming condensation or weather shifts. However, experience tells us that about 60–80% of failures stem from poor installation or configuration—the *unknown unknowns* that turn into costly frustrations.

Examples of Unknown Unknowns Uncovered

- **Winter Failures (A Known Unknown Misdiagnosed)**
  A water manager replaced XPS 15 transducers due to malfunctions during winter, and in Texas of all places. The real issue? A 30-ft coiled transducer cable near the mounting arm.

- **Electrical Noise (An Unknown Unknown Until It Wasn't)**
  Poor cable termination left several inches of a shield wire exposed, creating excessive electrical noise or acting as an antenna. A proper termination eliminated the interference.

- **Signal Ringing (A Forgotten Known Known)**
  A welded metal coupling on the mounting arm produced transducer ringing, distorting echoes. Isolating the transducer solved the problem.

- **Temperature Sensitivity (A False Known Unknown)**
  A transducer installed with a metal coupling seemed to fail due to heat or condensation. The real cause? Metal expands and contracts, distorting signals. A plastic coupling, per the manual, fixed it.

  A *known known* is that metal expands and contracts with temperature, yet this was overlooked. Customers suspected sunlight or condensation as the cause of level reading inconsistencies. The transducer was installed under a metal channel structure that acted as a sunshield. The sensor was slightly tilted—perhaps due to previous attempts to fix the issue—and continued to perform poorly.

  An *unknown known* to those troubleshooting was that all sensors were secured with metal couplings instead of the recommended plastic coupling. Though hand-

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tightened correctly, the echo profile showed a weak signal, with small echoes crossing the TVT curve, thereby reducing the echo confidence. As condensation increased or turbulence worsened, the signal slipped past the failure threshold. By identifying this overlooked issue, the *unknown known* became a known known—one that can now be prevented.

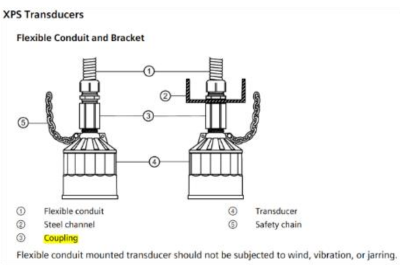
Prevent Unknown Unknowns: Follow These Known Knowns

- Avoid openly routing cables—use grounded metal conduit.
- Seal thread connections to prevent moisture ingress.
- Keep cables away from high-voltage lines and SCR drives.
- Use plastic couplings for mounting to prevent ringing.
- Hand-tighten transducers to prevent signal ringing.

Now that the *unknowns are known,* we can return to the basics and guide our customers in following good installation practices for successful operation.

Proper transducer installation prevents costly failures often misattributed to sensor limitations. Many issues stem from overlooked factors like poor cable routing, incorrect couplings, and environmental influences. By addressing these *unknown unknowns* and reinforcing best practices, users can avoid unnecessary replacements, switching technologies and improve reliability—principles that extend beyond level measurement solutions.

Ringing:
Ringing occurs when a transducer continues to vibrate after transmitting a pulse, instead of quickly settling into a listening state. This can be caused by metal couplings exciting the mounting structure, leading to prolonged signal distortion. It’s like two people talking at the same time—everything is there, the signal and the noise, but the content is compromised.



Metal coupling with tilted sensor

Herman Coello