

SIZING STEAM LINES

SIMPLE SIZING CRITERIA

Proper detailed design of a steam system should be done using detailed calculations for frictional losses in steam piping. The following examples and rules are meant to provide simple guidelines to see if steam pipe sizes are possibly undersized. They do not imply any design liability by Nicholson. Undersizing of steam lines can lead to reduced pressure to process equipment and impaired performance of valves, heat exchangers and steam traps. Steam line sizing along with condensate return line sizing should always be checked when a system is not performing up to expectations.

EXAMPLE: The system shown in Figure 3.1 will be used as our example. The Supply "S" at the right is 120 psig steam which is branching off to steam users A, B, C, D & E. The equipment usage is indicated in lbs/hr. The segments of piping will be addressed going backwards from the furthest end user A. The steam flow going through the pipe segment from the intersection X to equipment A is 1000 lb/hr (the usage of A). **A simple rule of thumb** for smaller steam piping (6" and below) is to keep steam velocities below 10,000 feet/minute (165 feet/second) for **short lengths of pipe only**.

The length of the steam line between X and A is 1000 feet, so the simple rule of thumb can not be applied here because the pressure drop will be too high. The pressure drop should be kept to a minimum, or supply pressure to the equipment will droop.

SOLUTION BY CHART: The chart is a graphic solution to help select pipe sizes. The pressure values used for this chart are in psia (absolute). For values given in gage pressure (psig), you must add 15 psi (14.7 psi actual). The example we will use is for saturated steam flow, but this chart does have corrections for superheat. There will be an overall system pressure drop, so that the pressure is assumed to be 5 to 10 psig below the supply pressure of 120 psig (135 psia). Enter the chart at the top at a point representing 130 psia and proceed

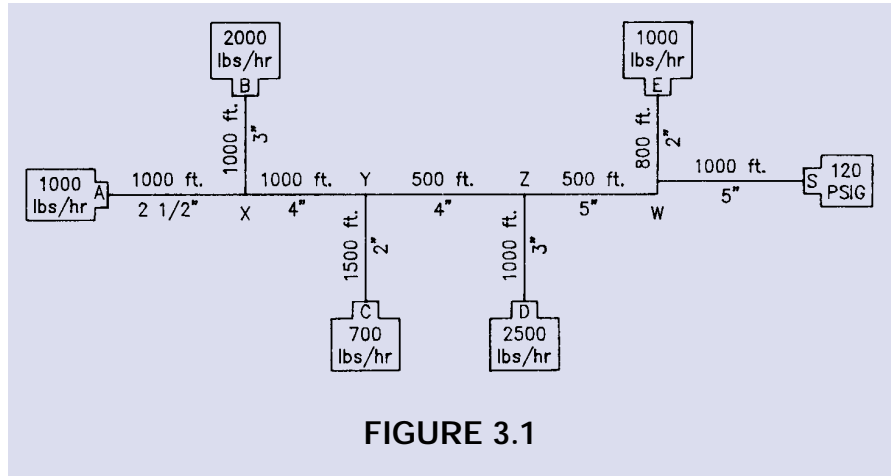


FIGURE 3.1

vertically downward. Enter the chart at the right at the value of the steam flow in Lb/minute (1000 lb/hr = 16.7 lb/min) and move horizontally across until the horizontal line intersects the vertical line. You will proceed along the diagonal, downward and to the right, parallel with the other diagonal lines.

This chart can be used two ways: either to determine the pressure drop of an existing pipe or to determine the correct pipe size for a specific pressure drop.

TO SIZE LINES: On the bottom of the chart is a pressure drop per 100 feet of pipe, select a value of 0.25 psi per 100 feet. This indicates 2.5 psi as the total loss for 1000 feet. Enter the chart at the bottom at .25 and move upward until you intersect the diagonal line. Proceed from the intersection horizontally left until you reach the actual pipe inside diameter to determine the pipe size. In this example, the pipe size for section X to A should be 2 1/2" pipe.

TO FIGURE PRESSURE DROP: Enter the chart on the left side at your pipe size and proceed horizontally until you intersect with the diagonal line. Proceed vertically downward to determine the pressure drop per 100 feet of pipe.

The next section of pipe to determine would be X to B. This would have the same pressure, but the intersection of the vertical line would be at the horizontal

steam flow of 33 lb/min (2000 lb/hr) for user B. The choice of pipe sizes can be argued, a 4" will yield 0.1 psi/100 feet pressure drop (1.0 psi per 1000 feet), but the more economical solution of a 3" pipe yields a 0.4psi/100 feet pressure drop. **Note:** when selecting the smaller more economical pipe size, there is less room for expansion and pressure drops will increase should additional process capacity arise.

For common sections of header such as Y to X, the steam flow for both steam users A and B must be combined. The vertical line will now intersect with the horizontal steam flow line coming across at 50 lb/min (3000 lb/hr). Using a 4" line will bring the pressure drop to a value of 0.22 psi/100 feet, or 2.2 psi for the 1000 foot section.

Remember that pressure drop figures from the bottom of the chart are per 100 feet, so segments such as Y to C have a larger total pressure drop because the distance is longer. Similarly, the total pressure drop from Z to Y is less because the distance is only 500 feet. The values for steam flow continue to be additive for each steam user; Z to Y is 3700 lb/hr (61.7 lb/min), W to Z is 6200 lb/hr (103.3 lb/min) and S to W is 7200 lb/hr (120 lb/min). Pipe sizes in Figure 3.1 are given for your reference and provide the user with reasonable pressure drops in the steam lines.

SIZING STEAM LINES CONT'D.

