Kirby tells us half of CanmetENERGY’s tests are done for steelmakers and half are for Canadian coal mines that sell coking coal to steelmakers. “We test the coal they send us in the proportions they suggest. But instead of a 4 or 6 meter high furnace, we test it in a furnace a little over 1 meter high by adjusting conditions. Among other things, we are testing to find the force of the wall pressure on the coke ovens, because most of the coke ovens in the world are old. If there is too much pressure on the oven wall, it will crack and leak, and they take many millions to fix.”

Possibly the single biggest concern for all coke producers is their ability to meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAAA ’90). A cracked oven wall produces emissions, and emissions bring huge fines. Coke is produced in a coke battery that is composed of many coke ovens stacked in rows into which coal is loaded. The generally accepted guideline is that a battery of coke ovens has a 20- to 30-year life span. This premise does not hold up when the merchant producer views their coke plant as a disposal site. Once the walls crack and leak, and they take many millions to fix. The greatest thing about dealing with Rice Lake is they really do customer service. Other scale manufacturers may have a five-year warranty as well, but if someone other than their service rep touches it, the warranty is nullified—and they want a purchase order number before they’ll show up!”

Jeff Wallace, GTR Scales Ltd.