Cutting labor cost and saving money on materials is something everyone would like to accomplish. Apla-Tech, Inc. of Kaukauna, Wis., can help contractors do just that. Jeff Denkins, president of Apla-Tech, has developed a revolutionary new method for applying glass mesh tape, along with being able to finish over it-pneumatically.

Since Denkins had a stable drywall company (Denkins Drywall) for many years, he thought there had to be a better, faster and easier way to finish ceilings and walls. “Bidding jobs became tougher. To stay on budget yet be competitive enough to get the job, I had to find a way to cut cost but not quality,” he says. As a result, Denkins developed three new tools for the drywall and plastering trades.

**Taping Problems Solved**

Using glass mesh tape would eliminate one step in labor and material, but the tape didn’t always stick to the walls and it was difficult to apply in corners. With this as incentive, Denkins developed the Apla-Taper II. This glass mesh tape applicator applies tape evenly to flat seams with the help of special rollers.
The Cannon is a fully pneumatic joint compound applicating tube that uses air pressure to apply an even and accurate coat of joint compound over flats and angles.

that “push” tape onto the walls. Switch to the angle head in a matter of seconds, and watch how the tape adheres squarely into corners, with the tape even on both sides. Both heads on the taper have a quick cut-action slide for easy cutting. When the tape is in the corners, use the corner roller provided to set the tape to board. Not only does this save time, but plasterers have found they can cut material costs by applying 2 inches of tape instead of 2 1/2 inches.

But once the Apla-Taper II was invented and proved its worth on glass mesh tape, the next problem Denkins confronted was the finish coat, especially in the corners. So back to the drawing board went Denkins, and the result is the Cannon.

The Cannon is the first fully pneumatic joint compound applicating tube. In keeping with the concept of making tools easy and light, the Cannon replaces an applicator’s arm and back pressure with air pressure. The use of air pressure enables the operator to simply hold the tool in place to apply an even and accurate coat of joint compound over the flats and angles. By injecting the compound through the glass mesh, an excellent finished angle is produced.

The Cannon uses a ball assembly like that of the standard angle box that allows the user to snap on his present 2-inch or 3-inch angle head. But by using air pressure, the head now “hydroplanes,” relieving the pressure from the bullets, and distributes the pressure evenly throughout the head. The result is that the blades work as before, applying an even coat, but not
cutting or snagging the tape. The Cannon is also adaptable to boxes for flat joint finishing. In addition to the 3-foot standard size, the tubes are available in various sizes.

Cleanup is a snap. Reduce the air pressure and remove the “mud” end of the tube, then watch as the material is pushed out. The applicator just adds water and gives it a quick rinse when the job is done. In fact, cleanup is so easy that the Cannon has been used extensively with catalyzed or setting-type compounds (as recommended by glass mesh manufacturers), as well as with ready mix for finish coats.

**Contractors Testify**

Greg Frings of Solid Products, Inc. has worked closely with Apla-Tech’s Denkins in the development of the Cannon. “This is a great innovation,” Frings says. “Not only will this help with wear and tear on the finisher and reduce workers’ comp claims, but for the first time since we’ve been making compounds, someone has developed a fast way to finish angles using glass mesh tape.”

Although not yet available, Solid Products is very close to introducing a ready-mixed compound designed for use with Denkins’ new products. Denkins has been testing with several drywall contractors and says, “The response has been extremely favorable, emphasizing the physical ease on employees.”

Bill Verhagen of Verhagen Drywall says, “I have found that working with the Apla System has saved us about 20 percent in labor and, although we use SW board (smooth wall), we still saved about a 10 percent savings on material. I think by switching to tapered-edge board, I would be able to save even more on material. I am glad to have switched over to this system.”

**We’re Not Finished**

Now that finishing over glass mesh tape was no longer a prob-
lem, there still had to be an easier way to fill the Cannon. With pneumatics still in mind, Denkins came up with yet another user-friendly tool: The Apla Pump, a highly versatile pump that is also pneumatic. It was designed to fill the Cannon with both catalyzed and ready-mix compounds.

By placing the tube to the fill valve and having it rest on the tube holder, the operator stands and watches the tube fill by itself. When the walls and ceilings have received the finish coat, the user empties the remaining compounds out of the reservoir and adds water to easily clean the pump. The pump’s heads can be cleaned with the spray-hose attachment—simply spray clean the Cannon with water.

The pump has a 1-gallon reservoir and rubber wheels for easy mobility. When empty, it weighs about 65 pounds. Three additional air outlets have the capabilities of simultaneously attaching two Cannons and a pneumatic drill for mixing, while filling a Cannon with material. You can also adapt it into a texture pump by snapping on material line, air hose and a pole gun.

“I have found there to be a 17 percent material savings and from 20 percent to 25 percent time savings using the Apla system. On smaller jobs the savings are even greater using quick-set compounds. My three-day jobs have turned into two days. I wish this had been out a long time ago,” says Doug Lewis of Doug’s Drywall & Paint.

The fact that the Apla Pump eliminates the need for bending down and hand-pumping compounds into tools is just one of the ways Apla-Tech is helping the industry in its search for easier techniques. “Pneumatic tools are a way of the future already used extensively on construction sites. It just seems natural to have drywall tools powered by air, with wrist, back, arm and shoulder fatigue so common in the trade. My tools are designed to help reduce worker fatigue as well as save time and money on the job.”