

# Contractor Supply

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## SERVICE OVER SCALE

### How Idaho Tool competes and wins



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Rolair's 13GR30HK30 produces 23 CFM at 175 PSI and comes with a GX390 Electric-Start Honda engine that features automatic idle-down, for increased fuel efficiency.



Contractors are increasingly focused on solutions that help crews work more productively and protect margins, creating opportunities for equipment and technologies that deliver lasting value.

"For distributors, these challenges create a clear directive: focus on products that deliver a strong ROI, maintain quality over long service lives, and are scalable enough to perform across a wide range of job types," says Mike Kelley, vice president of Rolair.

He says contractors need equipment that boosts productivity, minimizes downtime, and adapts easily from one project to the next, especially when labor resources are limited.

Against this backdrop, the outlook for the air compressor category remains positive.

"Even during periods of economic uncertainty, demand for air compressors stays strong because they are essential, versatile tools used across framing, finishing, roofing, and industrial applications," Kelley says. "A reliable compressor helps smaller crews work more efficiently, making it a valuable asset when labor is scarce or costly."

As a manufacturer of professional-grade air compressors, Rolair offers solutions designed to meet these market demands.

He specifically cites two models, the 8422HK30 and the 13GR30HK30, as being built with durability, performance, and versatility in mind.

"These compressors, both of which utilize the same Italian-made true two-stage pump, provide contractors with dependable air power capable of handling multiple applications, helping maximize usage across jobsites and improve overall equipment ROI," Kelley says.

The 8422HK30 is a portable wheelbarrow-style compressor capable of delivering 20.1 CFM at 90 PSI.

Conversely, the 13GR30HK30 is a truck-mounted stationary compressor capable of delivering 23 CFM at 175 PSI.

"With that amount of air delivery, both models can support a wide variety of tools across multiple crews," Kelley says. "By prioritizing high-quality, scalable products like these, distributors can better support contractors navigating today's construction challenges while positioning themselves for sustained demand in a resilient product category."

### CALIFORNIA AIR TOOLS

From the perspective of California Air Tools, the primary challenges continue to be centered around cost volatility, supply chain pressure, and freight inflation.

While California Air Tools' supplier network and workforce have stabilized over the past two quarters following the 2025 tariff adjustments, the recent Section 232 tariff changes implemented in April 2026 have introduced a new layer of cost pressure.

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California Air Tools is well positioned to capitalize on the demand for quieter, oil free air compressors with units such as the 4620AC, which has only 70 decibels of sound.

Roderick Eslinger, director of sales and marketing at California Air Tools, says the updates, including a 25% tariff on derivative metal goods and increased import tariffs on key components from China and Mexico, have directly impacted input costs across multiple product categories.

In addition, he says distributors should be aware of rising transportation costs, driven in part by a significant increase in diesel prices, which is already translating into higher carrier rates and added pressure on overall costs.

Products manufactured using U.S.-sourced steel and aluminum are benefiting from comparatively lower tariff exposure, which helps offset a portion of these increases.

“Our focus remains on maintaining price stability where possible, supporting our distribution partners, and ensuring consistent product availability,” Eslinger says. “We recognize that predictable pricing and reliable supply are critical for distributors navigating an uncertain cost environment.”

He says the portable air compressor market remains stable, resilient, and positioned for growth in 2026.

Within that landscape, California Air Tools is seeing a notable shift toward quieter, oil-free, and low-maintenance solutions, as end users place greater emphasis on ease of use, reliability, and work environment considerations.

Demand continues to be driven by a combination of construction, light industrial use, and increasing adoption across specialty applications.

“California Air Tools is well-positioned to capitalize on these trends,” Eslinger says. “Our business has delivered consistent year-over-year growth, supported by a diversified product portfolio that serves a wide range of applications from general construction to emerging segments such as dental and other specialty industries.”

In addition, he says the company’s continued expansion across national distribution channels and

key retail partners has significantly increased product visibility and accessibility.

Considering the current environment, Eslinger says distributors should focus on two key areas: product expertise and operational efficiency.

“First, proper product education is critical,” he says. “Air compressors are not a one-size-fits-all solution, and ensuring the right fit-for-application is essential to customer satisfaction and long-term performance.”

As use of air compressors expands into more specialty applications, misconceptions about noise and the idea that specialty applications require more complex or hard-to-source solutions become more prevalent.

“California Air Tools has been a leader in redefining this perception,” Eslinger says. “We offer one of the most comprehensive selections of ultra-quiet compressor solutions in North America, designed to support a wide range of applications from general use to highly specialized environments requiring clean, dry air and precise performance standards.”

To improve customer experience, he encourages distributors and dealers to familiarize themselves with the California Air Tools products overview section and various compressor categories and offerings.

Also, he notes that one of the significant trends shaping the air compressor market is the interest in smart, connected, and remotely managed equipment, particularly in precision-driven environments such as dental, biotech, and clean room applications.

“End users are increasingly prioritizing control, efficiency, and real-time system management, driving adoption of technologies that allow operators to monitor and adjust performance without being physically present,” Eslinger says. “As these technologies continue to evolve, the focus will remain on delivering smarter, quieter, and more efficient solutions that align with the increasing expectations of both distributors and end users.”

With the ongoing pressure on freight and input costs, he says strategic inventory planning and purchasing efficiency are more important than ever.

Consolidation of orders into full pallet or full truckload quantities can reduce per-unit costs and improve margins.

Specifically, Eslinger says distributors can benefit from

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Smart compressor connectivity allows features and parameters to be entered and controlled comfortably along with remote monitoring from phones, tablets or other devices.

direct shipment options from California Air Tools' North American manufacturing facilities, which often provide incremental freight savings compared to traditional warehouse fulfillment.

"Ultimately, distributors who combine strong product knowledge with disciplined purchasing and logistics strategies will be best positioned to remain competitive, protect margins, and meet customer expectations in a cost-sensitive environment," Eslinger says.

Looking ahead, California Air Tools remains focused on innovation, strategic channel growth, and delivering high-performance, ultra-quiet solutions.

The company's portfolio spans from compact 1-gallon units to large-capacity 80-gallon systems, including over 30 dry air models for precision applications across construction, industrial, and specialized markets.

"We are also focused on strengthening our position as a category leader through differentiated product offerings," Eslinger says.

For example, California Air Tools remains the only manufacturer offering a full range of aluminum tank compressors, from 2 to 10 gallons, delivering key advantages such as reduced weight, corrosion resistance, and long-term durability.

Additionally, features like automatic drain systems continue to address real-world customer needs around maintenance and reliability.

"We remain committed to the products that have built our reputation," he says, citing the 2 HP 4620AC aluminum twin stack compressor as a jobsite workhorse example. "Its longevity and reliability are a testament to

our design philosophy: build it right, and it will continue to perform in the field year after year."

As California Air Tool expands its footprint across national distribution, retail, and specialty verticals, Eslinger says it is also investing in tools and support systems that will make it easier for distributors and dealers to sell and support new products.

"Our goal is to be a true partner to our distributors, providing not only high-performing equipment, but also the resources, availability, and margin opportunities needed to grow their business," he says. "Ultimately, our strategy is simple: continue innovating, expand intelligently, and deliver dependable, high-performance ultra-quiet solutions that customers trust and dealers are proud to represent."

## BOBCAT

Portable air compressors continue to be essential on jobsites where electricity is unavailable, unreliable, or impractical.

"They support a wide range of applications from pneumatic hand tools and concrete breaking to drilling, surface preparation, blasting, and coating and offer simple, dependable setup in remote or constantly changing environments," says Cody Blythe, Bobcat product manager. "Rental demand remains a key driver as well, with fleet owners prioritizing machines that can withstand frequent turnover while remaining easy to maintain, transport, and operate."

On a broader scale, he notes that labor availability, tighter schedules, and rising sensitivity to downtime continue to shape jobsite decision-making.

"Crews are often smaller and less specialized, which increases the need for equipment that is easy to operate, reliable, and flexible enough to manage multiple applications," Blythe says. "At the same time, downtime is more costly than ever, whether caused by mis-sized equipment, maintenance delays, or machines that aren't designed for frequent use."

These pressures are pushing contractors to focus less on initial purchase price and more on up-time, predictable operating costs, and ease of service.

Within the context of air compressors, Blythe says distributors add the most value when they help customers select the right air solution, starting with the application, which tools are being used, hose length, pressure requirements, and not limit a sale or rental to just a compressor.

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