

Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting and Crushing System with Sensor-Based Counting

Prof. Mallikarjun. S. Bijapure¹, Pruthwiraj², Ankesh³, Aditya⁴, Mustaq Ahmed G⁵

¹Professor, Dept. Of Mechanical Engineering, PDA College of Engineering, Kalaburagi, India.

^{2,3,4,5}Student, Dept. Of Mechanical Engineering, PDA College of Engineering, Kalaburagi, India.

ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for automation and cost-effective solutions in industrial environments has driven the development of specialized systems capable of performing multiple sheet metal operations with precision. This project presents the design and implementation of an Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting & Crushing System with Sensor-Based Counting that integrates pneumatic actuation with intelligent control mechanisms to perform sheet metal cutting and crushing operations while maintaining accurate count of processed items through sensor-based feedback. Traditional sheet metal processing requires multiple separate machines and significant manual intervention, leading to higher operational costs, space requirements, and risk of human error. The proposed system utilizes a single integrated platform equipped with pneumatic cylinders, solenoid valves, and sensor arrays to automate both cutting and crushing operations while providing real-time counting capabilities through proximity sensors and microcontroller-based data acquisition. By incorporating smart control systems, safety interlocks, and sensor-based monitoring, this machine ensures precision, reliability, and operational safety. The system significantly reduces manual labor, enhances productivity, minimizes material wastage, and aligns with Industry 4.0 objectives. The outcome is a compact, cost-effective, and scalable solution suitable for small-scale workshops, manufacturing units, and fabrication industries seeking automated sheet metal processing capabilities.

Keywords: Metal Cutting, Crushing, Sensor

INTRODUCTION

Industrial automation has become a cornerstone of modern manufacturing processes. The use of pneumatic systems, which operate using compressed air, has gained popularity due to their reliability, simplicity, and cost-effectiveness. In industries where operations such as sheet metal cutting, material crushing, vice holding, and metal bending are repetitive and labor-intensive, there is a growing need for automation to reduce manual workload and enhance safety.

This project proposes the development of an Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting & Crushing System with Sensor-Based Counting capable of automating critical sheet metal operations with improved precision and reduced human intervention. This system will be designed to integrate mechanical processes with modern control systems, sensor technology, and automated actuation. The integration of safety mechanisms like emergency stops, interlocks, pressure relief systems, and programmable actuation will not only enhance operational efficiency but also reduce the risk of injuries in industrial settings.

The addition of sensor-based counting capability enables real-time tracking of processed items, which is crucial for quality control and production monitoring. This system serves as a cost-effective alternative to high-end CNC machines for small and medium-scale industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of automation using pneumatics, several studies and projects have contributed valuable insights. The key literature reviewed for this project includes:

R. Kumar et al. (2019) presented a pneumatic sheet metal cutter design that uses a double-acting pneumatic cylinder for fast and efficient cutting operations. The study highlighted the machine's capability to reduce operator fatigue and increase production speed in fabrication industries.

M. Patel et al. (2020) developed a multi-purpose pneumatic machine that combined operations like cutting and pressing. This approach minimized the need for multiple standalone machines and demonstrated significant space and cost savings in small workshops.

A. Sharma (2021) focused on the bending operation of sheet metals using pneumatics. His research emphasized how automation can reduce inconsistency in bending angles, especially in large-scale repetitive tasks. The incorporation of sensors allowed the bending angle to be controlled accurately.

K. Singh and A. Reddy (2022) explored the safety aspects of pneumatic automation. Their study proposed the use of interlocking systems and limit sensors to prevent accidents during machine operation. The results showed reduced operator injuries and improved reliability.

S. Banerjee et al. (2023) introduced the use of Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) in pneumatic machines. The integration of logic control and pressure feedback loops improved the flexibility and intelligence of the machines, making them suitable for complex industrial environments.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In many industrial settings, repetitive mechanical tasks such as metal cutting and crushing are performed manually or with semi-automatic machines that lack proper safety features and production monitoring capabilities. These conventional systems:

1. Involve significant human effort, increasing fatigue and labour costs.
2. Pose serious safety risks due to the absence of emergency stops, interlocks, and sensor-based controls.
3. Lead to inaccuracies and inconsistencies in output due to manual operation. Lack counting mechanisms, making production tracking cumbersome and error prone.
4. Require separate machines for different operations, consuming valuable floor space and capital investment.

Hence, there is a pressing need to design an automated, multi-functional pneumatic system that can perform sheet metal cutting and crushing operations while incorporating essential safety features and sensor-based counting capabilities.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this project is to design, develop, and implement a Smart Pneumatic Machine capable of automating multiple critical industrial operations with a strong focus on operator safety, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. The project aims to integrate pneumatic technology with intelligent control systems to carry out operations such as sheet metal cutting, material crushing, pneumatic vice holding, and metal sheet bending, which are commonly performed in workshops, small-scale manufacturing units, and fabrication industries.

In traditional industrial setups, these operations are often performed manually or using outdated mechanical systems that lack precision, consume more time, and expose the operators to potential hazards. This project proposes a smart system that addresses these limitations by leveraging pneumatic actuation, programmable control, and safety interlocks to carry out operations with minimal human intervention.

One of the core objectives is to enhance workplace safety by incorporating multiple layers of protection including emergency stop buttons, pressure relief systems, automatic retract mechanisms, and sensor-based interlocks. These features will prevent the machine from functioning under unsafe conditions, thereby protecting both the operator and the machine.

Another important objective is to reduce human fatigue and operational inconsistency. Manual handling of sheet metal, repetitive vice operations, or bending processes not only requires physical effort but is also prone to errors. By automating these processes, this project seeks to ensure consistent output, higher precision,

and increased production rates while minimizing the dependency on skilled labour.

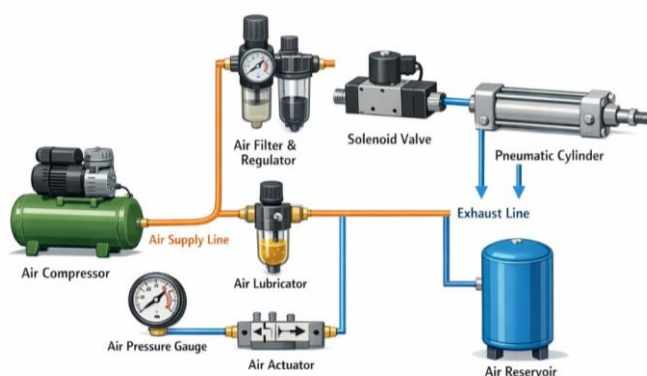
From a technical perspective, the project aims to design a modular pneumatic system that can perform multiple operations using a single compressed air source. This modularity ensures that each operation—cutting, crushing, holding, or bending—can be controlled independently or in sequence as required. This will be achieved using a central control unit, possibly a PLC (Programmable Logic Controller) or Arduino, to sequence the operations, manage timing, and coordinate input/output signals from sensors and actuators.

Another goal is to make the system cost-efficient and compact, suitable for small-scale industries that cannot afford high-end CNC machines or robotic systems. By using affordable pneumatic components, locally available materials, and open-source programming platforms, the machine can be produced at a low cost without compromising functionality.

Furthermore, the machine will be designed in such a way that it is easy to operate, maintain, and upgrade. The use of standard pneumatic fittings, replaceable tool heads, and modular frame design ensures that any part of the system can be repaired or upgraded without dismantling the whole unit.

In summary, the objective of this project is to create a multi-functional, safe, automated, and affordable pneumatic machine that improves industrial productivity, reduces human effort, and ensures operator safety, while laying the foundation for future enhancements such as IoT integration, data monitoring, and energy-efficient operations.

COMPONENTS



DOUBLE ACTING CYLINDER

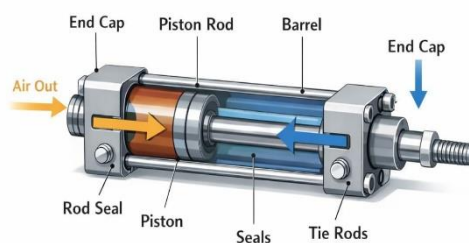


Figure-1: Basic Components of Pneumatic System



Figure-2: Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting & Crushing System with Sensor-Based Counting

Basic Components of Pneumatic System

The following key components are essential for the Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting & Crushing System:

Pneumatic Cylinders (Single/Double Acting)

For performing linear operations like cutting, bending, clamping and material holding.

3/2 or 5/2 Solenoid Valves

To control the direction of compressed air flow to pneumatic cylinders.

Cutting Blade Mechanism

Mounted on cylinder output for sheet metal cutting with precision edges..

Crushing Head/Die

Used to crush metal sheets or small components using pneumatic force.

Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) or Arduino Microcontroller

For sequencing operations, safety checks, and smart automation.

Limit Switches / Proximity Sensors

Detect end positions of actuators and prevent over-travel.

SMPS / Power Supply Unit

To power microcontrollers, sensors, and relays.

Indicator Lights and Buzzers

Indicate machine status (operation, fault, safety alert).

Pressure Relief Valve

Releases excess air to prevent overpressure accidents.

Interlocking Mechanisms

Ensures one operation is completed before the next begins and prevents unsafe conditions..

IoT Module (ESP8266/ESP32)

For remote monitoring or diagnostics.

Flow Sensors / Pressure Sensors

Monitor system performance and provide data feedback

NEED FOR THE STUDY

- **Increased Productivity:** Automation reduces operation time and enhances throughput in manufacturing lines.
- **Cost-Efficient Solution:** Compared to CNC and robotic machines, pneumatic systems are more economical and easier to maintain.
- **Space Optimization:** A single multi-operational machine reduces the need for multiple devices, saving valuable factory floor space.
- **Skill Gap Minimization:** Automation compensates for the lack of skilled labor in repetitive task
- **Energy Efficiency:** Pneumatics are energy-efficient and can be powered using renewable sources like solar-based air compressors.

METHODOLOGY

The project will be executed through the following systematic approach:

a. Research & Planning

- Study existing pneumatic systems and safety standards.
- Identify design requirements based on the intended operations.

b. Design Phase

- CAD modelling of the machine frame, tool holders, cylinder mounts, and pneumatic layout.
- Design individual modules for each operation (cutting, bending, etc.).

c. Component Selection

- Select appropriate pneumatic components: cylinders, valves, pressure regulators, flow controls, and compressors.
- Choose control systems (PLC or Arduino) with compatible sensors and actuators.

d. Fabrication & Assembly

- Construct the frame and mount all components.
- Connect pneumatic circuits using high-pressure air hoses and fittings.
- Attach safety switches and interlocks.

e. Programming & Automation

- Develop logic for sequencing operations using PLC/Arduino.
- Interface input sensors and output actuators to ensure synchronized operation.

f. Testing & Optimization

- Perform test runs of each operation under different loads.
- Calibrate pressure and stroke settings for optimal performance.
- Modify the program logic as required to improve reliability.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

By the completion of this project, the following outcomes are expected:

- A fully functional prototype of an Automated Pneumatic Sheet Metal Cutting & Crushing System with Sensor-Based Counting capable of:
 - Cutting sheet metal with precision
 - Crushing small components with controlled force
 - Counting and tracking processed items in real-time
 - Operating with minimal human intervention
- Automated control system that performs cutting and crushing operations in sequence or independently as needed.
- Sensor-based counting mechanism that provides accurate production tracking and data logging capabilities.
- Integrated safety systems for operational security and compliance with industrial norms.
- A cost-effective, space-saving, and versatile solution that can benefit small workshops and medium-scale industries.
- Technical documentation including CAD drawings, electrical schematics, and operation manuals. Scope for future expansion, including remote monitoring via IoT integration, mobile app-based control, or predictive maintenance capabilities

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