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COURSE BROCHURE

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Training Course

7 – 11 December 2026
Munich

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Training Course

Ref: 863_32696 **Date:** 7 – 11 December 2026 **Location:** Munich **Fees:** 6200 GBP

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting is a 1-week training course for process engineers, control room operators and refinery technicians who run fractionators, strippers and absorbers and leave with a column troubleshooting checklist. Columns sit at the heart of refining, petrochemical and specialty chemical sites, so a misread tray or a poorly tuned controller costs energy, product purity and run length. Jupiter Prime Training runs this distillation column operation and troubleshooting course.

Why Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Matters Now

Three forces shape column work today: feed slates that shift more often as crude and naphtha sources change, tighter energy targets that push reboiler and condenser duties down, and an operating workforce in which experienced board operators are retiring. A site that reads its columns well holds product specifications through feed swings, avoids unplanned shutdowns and spends less steam per tonne. A site that reads them badly chases off-specification product and loses capacity. The course rests on vapour-liquid equilibrium VLE principles, McCabe-Thiele stage analysis and the tray and packing hydraulic models used by column vendors.

Who Gains Most from Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting

- Engineers responsible for column performance monitoring, mass balances and test runs
- Board operators who adjust reflux, reboil and pressure from the control room
- Field technicians who take samples, read local gauges and isolate instruments
- Control specialists who tune temperature, level and pressure loops on fractionators
- Shift supervisors who decide between rate cuts, reflux changes and holding steady

A unit crew gains most when its engineer, board operator and field technician attend together.

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Capabilities

Participants move from reading a temperature profile to explaining what the trays and packing are doing inside the shell.

- Calculate minimum reflux and theoretical stages from equilibrium data — feed and specification changes
- Assess tray and packing hydraulics against flooding and weeping limits — throughput decisions
- Apply pressure drop and temperature profile trends to locate a fault — shift supervisors
- Design a control structure that holds composition through feed swings — control specialists
- Specify when a gamma scan or thermal survey is justified — maintenance planners
- Build a stepwise diagnostic routine for a named column — the unit crew

Key Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Terms

- Relative volatility — the ratio of how readily two components vaporise.
- Jet flooding — liquid carried upward by excessive vapour velocity until trays fill, pressure drop climbs and separation collapses.
- Downcomer backup — the height of liquid held in a downcomer; when it reaches the tray above, the column floods.
- Weeping — liquid leaking through tray openings at low vapour rates.
- Gamma scan — a radiation transmission survey across a column shell that shows liquid levels, froth heights and damaged trays.
- Internal reflux — the liquid actually flowing down the rectifying section, which differs from external reflux when subcooling is present.

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Day by Day

Day 1: Equilibrium and Separation Fundamentals

- Vapour-Liquid Equilibrium Curves — Feasibility of a Required Split
- Relative Volatility and K-Values — Sensitivity to Pressure Changes
- McCabe-Thiele Stage Stepping — Number of Theoretical Stages Needed
- Minimum Reflux and Total Reflux Limits — Operating Reflux Ratio Choice
- Column Mass and Energy Balances — Reconciling Plant Test Run Data

Day 2: Tray and Packed Column Hydraulics

- Sieve, Valve and Bubble Cap Tray Layouts — Turndown and Capacity Range
- Structured and Random Packing Behaviour — Pressure Drop Versus Efficiency
- Liquid Distributors and Redistributors — Maldistribution Risk in Packed Beds
- Tray Efficiency and HETP Estimates — Stage Count Verification
- Hydraulic Operating Window Diagrams — Safe Vapour and Liquid Loads

Day 3: Flooding, Weeping and Abnormal Operation

- Jet Flood and Downcomer Flood Mechanisms — Rate Cut or Reflux Cut
- Weeping and Dumping at Low Rates — Minimum Throughput Settings
- Foaming and Entrainment Signs — Antifoam Injection Decisions
- Differential Pressure Trending — Early Warning of Hydraulic Limits
- Fouling, Corrosion and Damaged Internals — Shutdown Scope Planning

Day 4: Column Control Strategies

- Pressure Control by Condenser Duty or Vent — Stable Relative Volatility
- Tray Temperature Control Location — Composition Holding Under Feed Swings
- Material and Energy Balance Control Schemes — Choosing Manipulated Variables
- Reboiler and Reflux Drum Level Loops — Disturbance Rejection Across Sections
- Feedforward and Inferential Analysers — Response to Feed Composition Change

Day 5: Practising the Column Troubleshooting Checklist

- Gamma Scan and Thermal Imaging Interpretation — Locating Internal Damage
- Temperature Profile Diagnosis Exercise — Separating Hydraulic From Control Faults
- Flooding Case Reconstruction With Plant Trends — Corrective Move Selection
- Control Loop Review on a Live Case — Retuning Versus Restructuring
- Column Troubleshooting Checklist — Stepwise Routine for the Participant's Unit

Applying Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting After the Course

- Plot a hydraulic operating window for one column using current plant loads and share it with the board operators.
- Run a temperature profile and differential pressure review with the shift crew.

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting Questions FAQ

What is distillation column operation and troubleshooting, and why does it matter now?

It is the practice of running fractionators within their equilibrium and hydraulic limits and diagnosing faults quickly. Shifting feeds, energy targets and retiring operators make that skill harder to find and more costly to lack.

Which roles gain most from distillation column operation and troubleshooting?

Process engineers, board operators, field technicians, control specialists and shift supervisors gain most. A shared method lets them agree on a fault faster.

How does distillation column operation and troubleshooting differ from a process design course?

It works on columns already in service. A design course sizes new equipment; this one reads trends, scans and profiles from an operating unit and chooses the corrective move.

What do you bring back from distillation column operation and troubleshooting?

You bring back a stepwise diagnostic routine for your own column, an operating window chart and a clearer view of when to call for a gamma scan.

Distillation Column Operation and Troubleshooting: The Way Forward

The column troubleshooting checklist first informs the next abnormal event: whether to cut rate, cut reflux or hold. Board operators and process engineers use it together during upsets and test runs. After its first use, revisit the hydraulic limits it assumes, since fouling and feed changes move the flooding point over a run.