



Greasing the government

Cortec Corporation knows how to attract government buyers, and its EcoLine is ready made for the new federal bio push

BY CINDY GREEN

St. Paul, Minn. —A U.S. military tank sits in storage for years. In a day's notice, it is ready for battle in a remote desert. The tank is lubricated, corrosion-free, and has a clean fuel line. A plastic coating — like a giant shrink-wrap — along with greases and fuel additives, has protected the machine and kept its engine ready for action.

The protectors are all ag-based products made by Cortec Corporation. The 25-year-old St. Paul company has been selling products to the government for years. In 2002, Cortec representatives testified before Congress in favor of mandating that federal agencies give preference to biobased products, (see story above)

"The government is definitely in our top 10 in sales," says Bob Boyle, Cortec technical sales manager. The U.S. Air Force is Cortec's single biggest customer; although automobiles is its largest industry customer. Cortec manufactures all types of protective fluids including cleaners, cutting fluids, films, sprays and packaging materials. Its EcoLine includes

degradable bags and soy-based greases and fluids.

Despite the feds' "red tape" reputation, "selling to the government can be a very smooth process," Boyle says. Even though, at times, "it can take forever just to get to the right person, sometimes we will be working on one specific project and it will go through with no hitches."

With the new federal program, biobased will be preferred, but "we have to show equivalent performance (with petroleum-based products.) Actually, our soy-based rust preventatives perform better." When conventional rust barriers are removed from equipment that has been in storage a long time, "it has to be chiseled off. The soy-based (barrier) is easy to remove."



Bob Boyle

"We want to make sure our products outperform," Boyle says. "If it takes less time to get equipment ready, it saves time and money. So if (the government) is paying a slight premium, it's worth it."

Before the military started buying Cortec's protective wrap, "they would have to dismantle vehicles before they went into storage ... It could take a week to get them going again." A plastic wrap requires only dismantling the cable, and when the vehicle is needed, "they cut open the bag, connect the battery cable, attach the antenna and drive."

Military vehicles can be stored for up to five years, and "we've done 10-year preservation methods for the auto industry."

Cortec also sells Eco Works degradable corn-resin bags to the Department of Interior. "They are used by parks for operating their composting programs," Boyle says. "It's an easy way of collecting materials, and you don't need to de-bag at the compost site."

"The (degradable) bag is actually stronger" than conventional plastic. Exposure doesn't cause it to degrade; it's water-stable, thermally stable." But left in a compost heap,

"micro-organisms will cause the bag to degrade at the same rate as the contents."

Through the federal bio-preference program, Cortec will be also be offering citric- and soy-based cleaners, ethanol and biodiesel stabilizers, and soy-based door and vehicle lubricants, which offer two years of protection verses six months for petroleum products, Boyle says.

When federal agencies start shopping around for more biobased products, "they can focus on the environment if they want — or performance," Boyle says. "Either way we get good results." •



A biobased plastic wrap made by Cortec Corporation keeps a military airplane clean, lubricated and corrosion-free so it is ready for action at a moment's notice.