High Performance Exports

Warwick Mills Penetrates World Markets with Help from the International Trade Resource Center

NEW IPSWICH—The headquarters of Warwick Mills may be on the site of the oldest textile mill in New Hampshire, but its products are leading edge, even by 21st century standards. Warwick's advanced high performance, flexible composite materials are used in the aerospace, recreational, industrial, law enforcement, military, and medical industries. Thanks in part to assistance from New Hampshire's International Trade Resource Center (ITRC), the company has penetrated markets all over the world.

Warwick Mills' Vice President of Business Development, Jennifer Houston, has high praise for ITRC. "ITRC has been a tremendous resource for us. We've attended many of their seminars, They've helped us understand markets and how to export, right down to making sure we have the right export numbers and that products are classified correctly. When we're unsure of how to proceed, they're right there to help. As a result, we've been able to expand our markets outside the U.S. to Australia, the Middle East, Europe and the Far East."

Exports are having a sizable impact on Warwick Mills' business. In 2005, exports accounted for under 10% of all sales; in 2006, the figure will jump to 50%, thanks to new contracts. In 2001, Warwick Mills had 65 employees. By mid-March 2006, the company had over 100, and the number is still increasing.

New Hampshire Support Critical to Warwick Mills' Success

Houston also cites the tremendous support Warwick Mills has had from the state of New Hampshire, including Governor Lynch, Senators Gregg and Sununu, and Congressman Bass. "They supported us in several SBIRs (Small Business Innovation Research grants), and they also supported funding for body armor research." This led to a $10 million subcontract from Lockheed Martin in which Warwick Mills is supplying all the structural materials and sealing systems for high-altitude airships.

In October 2005, Warwick Mills participated in a trade mission to Germany led by Governor Lynch and organized by ITRC. According to Houston, "ITRC set up appointments for us with different organizations. The result: we won a contract with a Germany company and hooked up with a company in the Netherlands."

The contract with the Germany company is substantial: supplying the Dutch National Police with 25,000 TurtleSkin panels for protective vests. Due to gun control, in Europe the issue is making protective vests resistant to stabs by knives and other sharp objects, and penetration by needles, as opposed to penetration by bullets. Warwick Mills also recently won a contract to supply the Korean National Police Agency with body armor.

Warwick Mills' TurtleSkin materials have been used for the crash bags that were used to safely land NASA's Spirit and Opportunity Rovers on Mars. They are also used in demanding applications such as the world's largest single-masted sail, snake-resistant clothing for outdoor enthusiasts, and bicycle tire liners. The lightweight, flexible protection provided by TurtleSkin's Metal Flex Armor (MFA) is revolutionizing the way body armor manufacturers produce their products.

Houston explains, "Safety is a huge issue overseas. For instance, we provide safety gear for ultra-high-pressure waterjet operators. Ultra high pressure waterjets are used in industrial settings for heavy duty cleaning. In home use, pressure waterjets average around 3,000 psi (pounds per square inch), while in industrial settings, the ultra high pressure pumps go to 40,000 to 50,000 psi; being hit by these can be fatal. In the U.S. there are no regulations for protection of waterjet operators, but in the U.K. protection is mandatory."

Warwick Mills has recently introduced a TurtleSkin FullCoverage Glove that provides a high level of puncture and cut protection over the entire hand and wrist. Designed to protect workers in environments where punctures, cuts, and abrasions are daily threats—such as glass manufacturers and waste handlers—this glove is the first on the market to offer complete puncture-resistance from fine, sharp penetrators. The glove, which is already gaining acceptance in U.S. manufacturing plant, should do well overseas, as well.