

Entek International

By Craig Wollner

Entek International, LLC—one of Oregon's innovative high-tech manufacturing industries—is a plastics products manufacturer in Lebanon. Its primary business is the manufacture of polyethylene battery separators—sheets of nonconducting porous material made primarily from silica that are placed between positive and negative plates in storage batteries. The separators prevent short circuits caused by the bending and touching of the plates.

Entek began in 1979 in James Young's basement with the invention of a machine for cutting and heat sealing separator materials for use by battery makers. The device could do the work of fourteen laborers manually stacking porous cedar or PVC leaf separators in a battery line.

In 1984, Young sold his interest in the firm to a partner, Peter Johnson, and established Entek International to develop a new technique for making the separator material. The engineering branch developed into Entek Manufacturing, which makes machines to extrude the silica sheets.

Over the next decade, both aspects of Entek became successful. In 2002, Entek International brought to market a new separator material for energy-dense lithium-ion batteries, which are used in cell phones, laptop computers, power tools, and hybrid-electric cars and trucks. By 2006, the company was making about 1.6 billion square feet of RhinoHide separators, its brand, in plants in Lebanon and Newcastle Upon Tyne, England.

Entek also ventured into new products, introducing in 2008 hydrophobic micro-porous films that can be laminated to polyester and nylon to create waterproof, breathable fabric. The product is used in active and extreme sportswear, professional uniforms, and outdoor wear.

James Young was named the state's Manufacturing Entrepreneur of the Year in 1994, and Entek received the 1997 Oregon Governor's Occupational Health and Safety Award. In November 2007, Young sold Entek International to his senior management team, while retaining ownership of Entek Manufacturing. As of June 2008, Entek employed 465 people internationally.

Sources

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