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Above are Just a few of the products that the Spooner Cortec plant fills for other companies. The Cortec plant serves more than 200 companies worldwide.

The Bull Frog brand is Cortec's offering in the retail line. It uses the VpCI chemical that Cortec sells to industrial clients and is available locally at Triple A Sports.

Spooner company reaches out to world, beyond

BY FRANK ZUFALL

Here is a quiz for those who think they know the local business community like the back of their hand:

•What Spooner business, with a long-term presence, do many people drive by every day and not realize is there?

•What business manufactures its own line of products and does subcontracting for another 200 others?

•What business sends products it manufactures to more than 70 countries, and believe it or not, even into outer-space with the space shuttle?

"Hummmmm..." you say.

The answer is Cortec.

The company is located at 1300 South River St., just north of Northwest Regional Planning Commission on Hwy. 63 in Spooner. It is the company with the wooden cowboy standing in

front.

Don't feel bad for Cortec if you didn't answer the questions right. They are used to the anonymity even though if you think about it, the company is right there, out in the open.

John Johnson is the plant manager for Cortec Spooner operation. He said that part of the reason people don't see what's right in front of them is that Cortec sends very few of its products to the local market.

The operation, formerly known as the Rawn Company, is one of several plants in Minnesota and Wisconsin in the Cortec corporation.

The site was purchased in 1998 by Boris Miksic, Cortec Corp. owner and CEO, and is part of Miksic's plan to create a world-class aerosol manufacturing plant.

The factory itself is a long

structure with five assembly lines and filling stations located around the building.

The Spooner staff includes Johnson; Roger Hanson, customer service representative and marketing specialist; Erica Sherrer, customer service; Michele Hartwig, purchasing; and plant operations specialists Tedd Fischer, J.R. Dolan, Sue Whiteaker, Deb Statz, and Tony Olson.

Johnson said Cortec can fill aerosol cans, bottles, air-pressure containers, and 1-, 5-, and 55-gallon drums.

The plants main purpose is to fill Cortec products that use the company's patented VpCI chemical, a product, according to Cortec literature, with so much versatility in stopping corrosion it is even used on the space shuttle.

From personal experience

Johnson knows (he product works. He tells a story of leaving his tool box in a place that was exposed to moisture over the winter. When he opened the box in the spring, none of the tools had rusted, even though a quarter-inch of water was sitting in the tool tray. Johnson said what kept them from rusting was a piece of Cortec fabric manufactured at a different plant that uses the VpCI formula-emitting ions which prevent rust from occurring.

In the showroom, the public can see the effectiveness of the chemical. In two glass bottles, steel wool was placed at the same time. One of the bottles contains the Cortec chemical and one doesn't. In the bottle without the chemical, the water is rusty and brown. However, in the bottle with Cortec chemical, the water is clear.

Although the primary purpose of the plant is to serve Cortec, the plant also fills orders for other companies.

Johnson said some companies will send the product they, want filled such as the gun oil, and some companies will ask the Spooner plant to mix the product on site.

Johnson has worked at the plant for 15 years. He started off as quality control and worked himself up through the ranks.

Because of the constant changing, he said, the management challenge is being able to keep up and plan for potential difficulties, like changing in a timely manner from oil-base substance operation to filling a cleaner that requires a spotless environment.

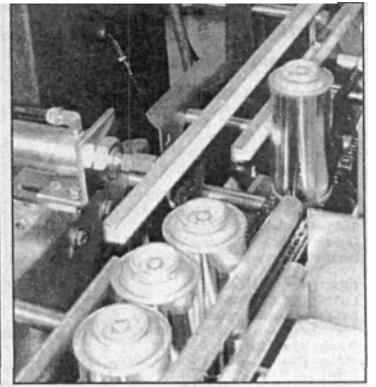
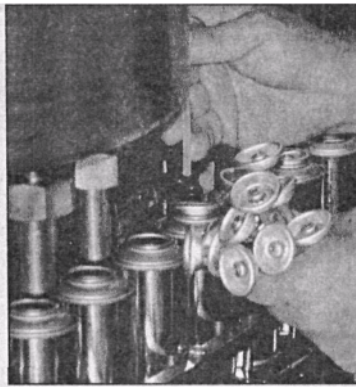
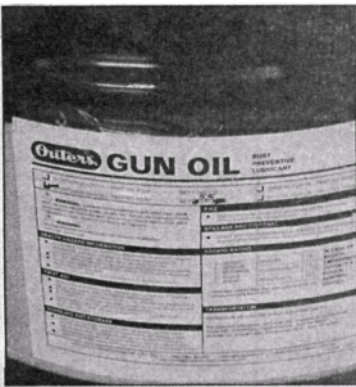
He said all of the people at Cortec are highly trained to do their job and the positions of others.

Cross-training is encouraged at the plant because the demands on the company change so quickly, and Johnson said he needs his staff to respond just as quickly to the needs.

He added that the company emphasizes safety and the record is very good at Spooner. The company and the industry are working on reducing the affects of aerosol sprays on the environment and creating products that work by pressurized air, he said.

To keep the environment safe for the workers and the community, Johnson said, waste products are taken off-site by Waste Research WRR environmental service of Wausau.

The plant manager also said that Cortec will have a presence in Spooner for many years and future plans include renovating the building's boiling system and other improvements.

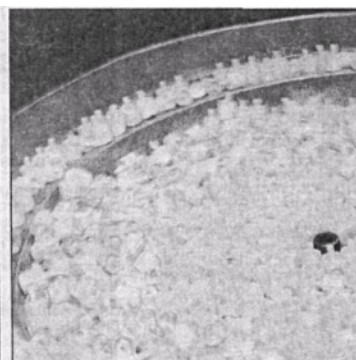
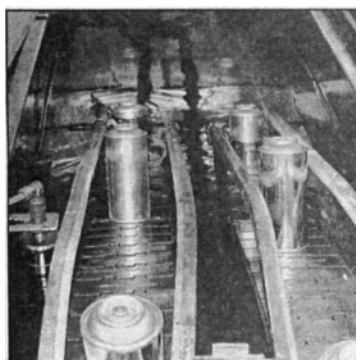


The company with the wooden cowboy standing in front

Gun oil, a product of one of Cortec's clients, is brought in by 55-gallon drum and will be transferred to aerosol cans. Photos by Frank Zufall

Valves are placed in the cans after they are filled with gun oil.

The cans are weighed as they move down the assembly line. Cans that are too light are kicked off the line.



A heated bath warms the cans and test their ability to hold the contents under higher pressure.

After they have been in the bath, spray buttons from a hopper are attached to the cans.

Stamped numbers indicate the product number and the shelf life.

Lastly, the cans have a label applied and they are ready to be sent to the contractor.