



Three of the four partners of Eagle Rubber Products, from left, Dick Green, Don Neff and Gary Weserman. The other partner is president Jack Chickos.

Eagle Rubber seals role in market with flexibility

By focusing its efforts on taking smaller, custom orders that larger companies typically don't fill, Eagle Rubber Products has carved out a niche in the manufacturing industry. "Everything we do here is custom manufacturing according to customer blueprints or material specifications," said plant manager Rick Green. "That let us get to know a lot of our customers. You develop relationships with them. It's not all based on price." Eagle's rubber gaskets are used in several industries: glass, steel, waste treatment, metals processing and plastics procuring, according to Don Neff, materials manager. In addition to specializing in custom work, the Zelienople plant specializes in small to medium runs, said Neff. "A lot of other companies won't do runs that small." While its product is geared toward industrial applications, as opposed to products the consumer would shop for, some of its products are close to consumer items. For instance, one rubber gasket is used by a company to put the label on crayons. Another

company uses the gaskets in slitting and shearing steel sheets into the pieces that will later be pressed into baking pans.

Other applications include sealing the lids on tankers, making valves in the oil and gas industries, in the manufacturing of windows and mirrors, and in cutting steel sheets. Incidentally, Eagle Rubber discovered a new product line in knuckle protectors when a customer asked if it had anything that could be used to place on pump bars to protect workers' hands. Eagle Rubber gave them some donut-shaped rubber rings to act as a barrier.

Neff and Green, along with Gary Weserman, sales manager, and Jack Chickos, president, are former Castle Rubber employees, a former rubber company in East Butler.

The four struck out on their own, starting out with "four walls and no equipment" in 1992, according to Green. A year later, they sent out their first shipment.

The company now has 20 employees and about 150 customers.

Eagle Rubber has three primary product lines. One is lathe-cut gaskets.

Another is stripper rings or slitter spacers, which are used as spacers in slitting large steel coils.

The other line is rubber-covered rolls. In this process, the customer will ship steel cores, which are essentially long steel rods. Eagle Rubber applies adhesive and uncured rubber to the cores, which are then wrapped in plastic. The rubber is cured and ground.

"Most of the gasketing material base polymer is nitrile, which is oil-resistant, fuel-resistant, or neoprene," Neff said.

One project in the pipeline, Neff said, is color-coding rubber gaskets in a joint-venture with Eagle Elastomers and with Gasket Resources.

"Some of these industrial seals will be used in carrying some very nasty things, like hydrochloric acid," Neff said. "Others are used for gas or non-volatile liquids.

"Color coding lets the companies quickly identify which gasket to use and which ones shouldn't be reused elsewhere, Neff said, adding you don't want to take a seal used to transport hydrochloric acid for a truck that's hauling milk.

"It's under way now, but it's in the fledgling stages," Neff said. "The clients in mind are trucking and railroad companies."

Eagle Rubber also creates Kevlar-reinforced materials, which can be subjected to high pressure and used in pipe repair.

The majority of Eagle Rubber's client base, about 70 percent, is east of the Mississippi River, primarily because of the sizes of the shipments that customers must make.

Logistically, it doesn't make sense for someone in California to ship a steel core here for an order, Neff said.

Eagle Rubber Products

Address: 306 Halstead Blvd.

Zelienople, PA 16063

President: Jack Chickos

Employees: 20

Items made: Lathe-cut rubber gaskets

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— Rick Green, plant manager



Customized rubber gaskets are produced by Eagle Rubber Products.



Eagle Rubber roll builders, from left, Don Neff and George Lill prepare an autoclave to cure rubber products



Roll builder Don Miller checks the diameter of a roll he's building at Eagle Rubber.