



Ninety Arctic King tanks comprising a fuel tank farm for the Baffinland Iron Ore Mine.

## SEI INDUSTRIES, LTD.

Liquid containment company increases product base to reach various market sectors

by Michael Foreman

LAUNCHING ANY NEW PRODUCT REQUIRES aggressive branding and education, more so if your company has been pigeonholed as a specialist in a niche market. Known as a leading supplier of firefighting gear, SEI Industries, Ltd. needed to raise awareness for its latest venture and establish itself in an entirely different industry. Just as SEI was gaining ground, poor visibility brought growth to a screeching halt—a short-term problem that the company has addressed by intensifying efforts to educate the industry across the globe.

SEI first made its name with the Bambi Bucket, the collapsible water delivery system that revolutionized helicopter-assisted firefighting. Next the company introduced portable fabric basins to aid firefighters on the ground. Both remain the company's most profitable product lines to date.

But if the Bambi Bucket is the face of SEI, its best hope for expansion lies with lesser-known products. At its remote site and environmental divisions, engineers produce durable urethane fabric

tanks for storing fuel, chemicals, or potable water. Dubbed Terra Tanks, the flexible, collapsible tanks (or "bladders") are designed to withstand extreme climates at oil, gas, and mining operations, while containment berms and filtration systems guard against pollution.

Terra Tank development actually began more than 20 years ago, when the Canadian military sought reliable liquid storage for remote missions. "We worked closely with the Department of National Defense to understand their

### AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:  
DELTA, BC

AREA OF SPECIALTY:  
LIQUID CONTAINMENT  
AND HANDLING IN  
REMOTE LOCATIONS

AVERAGE  
ANNUAL SALES:  
\$20 MILLION

EMPLOYEES:  
100

requirements, and since then they've been our best customer," says Mark Tayler, general manager at SEI. "It continues to be our inspiration for continued innovations."

It was a short leap to more commercial applications. To make a clean break from the Bambi brand, the company spawned two new divisions, each staffed with its own marketing team. "What's provided a lot more growth is that we've created a focus where we have a business within a business," Tayler says. He began drawing on existing

distribution channels, and from 2005 to 2007, those areas generated a 10 percent increase in sales annually.

Then in 2008, the government agency Environment Canada overhauled regulations for bulk fuel storage and failed to account for SEI's unique tanks—an oversight that proved costly for the company. A separate agency tasked with enforcing those regulations, Indian Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), took the omission for a flat prohibition.

"In April of last year, they informed our

customer base—really the industry—that they proposed a ban on the use of fuel bladders," explains Tayler. When potential customers shied away, SEI moved swiftly to rectify the situation, consulting with Environment Canada to draft an addendum allowing for its tanks. But the damage had been done: SEI's steady growth all but disappeared for that year. "It just wreaked havoc on our business," Tayler says.

That problem was only temporary, as the addendum was eventually approved. And because it was written around their materials and production methods, SEI literally set the standard for the industry.

"We operate at much higher levels than our competitors," Tayler says, pointing to proprietary technologies like radio frequency welders that produce stronger joints. "So it will actually be in our favor because we'll be able to meet the standard where others will not. But

“That’s our strategy: to really get the message out about the product line and spend more time and effort educating our customer base on the additional value that we bring.”

*Mark Tayler, General Manager*

## Solutions: Terra Tank

Terra Tank containers are specifically designed for different types of liquid storage and applications. Bladders can be constructed from three types of fabrics: Petro-Shield, Chem-Shield, and Aqua-Shield to contain liquids ranging from jet fuel to chemical solutions.

The Terra Tank system is easily and quickly installed and can be used immediately. Almost no site preparation is involved. They are lightweight and fully collapsible, and they offer a liquid-containment capacity many times larger than their transportable size. The Terra Tank can easily be folded, transported, and relocated. Compared

to steel tanks, the Terra Tank offers significant cost savings in transportation and site preparation and it won't rust or corrode.

Terra Tank containers are constructed from strong industrial fabrics and are crafted to the highest production standards in the industry. The durable fabric of the tank always hugs the surface of the contained fluid so only a few square inches of liquid are exposed directly to the air. This is an important feature for fuel storage, as there is virtually no area where water vapour can condense and contaminate the fuel.



*SEI-designed secondary containment berms help companies worldwide meet environmental regulations.*

more importantly, it's providing the INAC inspectors with the required guidance they need to help administer the use of the product."

On the heels of that negotiation, Tayler flew to Moscow on a trade mission sponsored by the Canadian embassy. SEI already counted customers from Egypt to Siberia and Brazil, but the INAC episode showed just how important brand management can be. It was an opportunity to key in oil and gas giants overseas to the capabilities of Terra Tanks.

Tayler also focused efforts on two additional regions: South America and the Middle East. The South American market in particular needed attention as local competitors with inferior products had started edging in. Prospects there tend to focus on dollars saved up front, Tayler says, not reliable construction and longevity. Once again, education would be paramount.

In response, the company assigned dedicated sales managers to both regions—staff that spoke the native languages

and could translate marketing materials for local agents. With Canadian laws smoothed over and fresh foreign leads in hand, Tayler expects to recoup last year's losses in 2009.

"That's our strategy: to really get the message out about the product line and spend more time and effort educating our customer base on the additional value that we bring," he says. "That's the biggest thing for us. The message that we want to share is that we're a world leader." CEO