

LOCAL

SBA recognizes Midwest Industrial Supply's export efforts, company expands Canton facility



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CANTON – Midwest Industrial Supply has been selected as Northern Ohio Exporter of the year by the Small Business Association.

The recognition comes on the heels of a recent expansion at Midwest Industrial's headquarters at 1101 Third St. SE. A new production cell allowed Midwest to triple production of three key products — EnviroKleen, MineKleen and EK35.

Midwest's products are used for dust control, soil stabilization, lubricating rails and deicing or anti-icing. Bob Vitale started the company in 1975, and now serves as chief executive officer, while his son Steve Vitale is president.

A panel of judges from outside Ohio, selected Midwest as Exporter of the Year for the SBA's Cleveland office, which covers 26 northern Ohio counties. It's one of several awards presented during Small Business Week, which started Monday.

The SBA considered revenue and profits from exports, as well as steps Midwest took to address export-related problems such as trade financing, market-entry, logistical challenges, and cultural differences.

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The new production equipment is a major step for the company, which plans to continue to invest in its manufacturing processes and capabilities, Steve Vitale said.

Midwest developed an automated system that improves safety for handling raw materials used to make the compounds. Automation also reduces the number of steps needed to make the products, increasing efficiency and production.

Midwest Industrial's 20 years of product development

The company has spent the past 20 years perfecting the compounds and obtaining patents, Bob Vitale said. Midwest has worked with its customers, as well as engineers, environmental scientists and independent testing agencies to develop formulas for its dust control and soil stabilization products.

Liquids made by Midwest Industrial help reduce the amount of dust created by heavy machinery traveling on gravel and dirt roads. Soil stabilization compounds help bind gravel or aggregate to create a stronger surface and reduce ruts and potholes.

Bob Vitale started off selling products designed to reduce dust in mines, steel mills and power plants, as well as anti-icing chemicals for conveyor and railroad equipment. The company's products and customer base have broadened as Vitale helped customers apply technology to common problems, he said.

"A principal requirement is that we aren't going to create a problem bigger than the problem we're trying to solve," Bob Vitale said.

So Midwest has developed its products from eco-friendly compounds. Residents living near facilities that use Midwest Industrial compounds can breathe easier and the environment remains sustainable, he said.

Midwest Industrial's international growth

Bob Vitale started selling products to customers in Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky. As Midwest's product line broadened, the company began connecting with customers in other states and Canada.

The company now has production in Spain and sells to customers in Europe, Africa and Asia. About 10% of the company's sales come from exports, Bob Vitale said.

International sales led to the regional SBA award. The agency recognizes small businesses that have been exporting for at least three years. Winning businesses must show increases in export sales, profits, and job growth. They also must deploy creative overseas marketing strategies, encourage other small companies to export, and help create export trading companies.

The family-owned business has just under 100 employees, with about 55 working at its Canton facilities along Third Street SE and east of Madison Court SE. The company also has operations in Illinois, California, Texas and Georgia.

As with most companies in the area, Bob Vitale said, Midwest is hiring workers.

Midwest customers are in the industrial, construction, oil and gas, mining, military and railroad business segments.