



EP secures contract

— By Melissa Dunson
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Thanks to an innovative lighted display that shows how much power the batteries have left, EaglePicher has gained a government contract of more than \$3 million with the Army.

EaglePicher Technologies announced Wednesday that the U.S. Army Communications Electronics Life Cycle Material Command approved the company's latest design for the new BA-5590 battery that will be used primarily in communications systems.

Members of the EaglePicher Technologies plant in Joplin were involved in the design of the new batteries, which are being produced in Vancouver, Canada. The original contract was for 40,000 units that will be delivered to the Department of Defense in the first quarter of this year. Art Fiacco, spokesman for EaglePicher, said the company expects other follow-up orders, and it currently sells the battery to other branches of the military and to nonmilitary contractors.

EaglePicher originally won the contract in April 2006, but it had to redesign the batteries later in the year when the Army came back with updated qualifications.

Fiacco said EP created a new battery specifically for the contract. The design and qualification period was nine months long. The new light-emitting diode display is designed for both night operations and bright-light environments. With one press of the thumb, the display shows what percentage of capacity the battery has left.

Fiacco said the Army used to prematurely discard the batteries after each mission because perfect performance was critical. Now, staff members can check exactly how much power is left and make replacement decisions based on that factor.

"It will have an environmental impact. We just didn't really have time to figure out how much," Fiacco said. "The military uses a lot of batteries, mostly in communications equipment. It used to be, whenever they went on a mission, they just changed the batteries and threw them out. They've been doing that for a long time, but now they don't have to. So, there is an impact."

The batteries are the next generation of EP's high-energy lithium sulfur dioxide BA-5590 model that was launched and field-tested in 2005. The original battery has proved to be one of the most popular military batteries, providing primary and backup power for communications equipment, imaging devices and weapons systems, according to the company.

Joplin Construction

EaglePicher announced in September that it was building a 24,000-square-foot plant in the Crossroads Center Business and Distribution Park in Joplin for development and production of lithium-ion cells and batteries. The company committed \$10 million to the project, which was expected to be operational by February.

Fiacco said it is his understanding that the Joplin construction is on schedule for completion in February. The new batteries will be used for space and defense programs, and are considered to be the industry's future because they are two-thirds the weight and the cost of older nickel batteries.

In October, EaglePicher received \$2.3 million in the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2007 for research and development of the lithium-ion batteries. The company will continue to manufacture nickel-cadmium and nickel-hydrogen batteries.

Melissa Dunson is the business writer for The Joplin Globe.

EP Numbers

Since an Air Force flight experiment in 1977, more than 400 spacecraft, Earth imaging and weather satellites, Global Positioning System satellites, scientific research projects and interplanetary probes have used EaglePicher cells, according to the company.

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