

MANUFACTURING

Burnaby company producing hundreds of portable shelters for Canadian soldiers

Weatherhaven operates in 50 countries, providing self-contained systems for military, commercial and medical purposes

BY BRIAN MORTON

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When Canadian soldiers bed down after a day of fighting Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan, they are more than likely sleeping in a state-of-the-art portable shelter manufactured by a Burnaby company.

Weatherhaven has been producing redeployable shelters and shelter systems for remote sites for three decades, but it's in the past 15 years that its technology has been utilized for military purposes, especially for Canadian troops overseas.

"We now have about 20 military customers around the world," Weatherhaven CEO and part-owner Ray Castelli said in an interview. "The Canadian military is about one-third [of our total overall business]. We built the Canadian base [in Kandahar] for 2,000 soldiers. We have 500 buildings there.

"We see a huge opportunity to expand the company internationally — militarily, and in construction and disaster relief."

Weatherhaven, which has total revenues of about \$70 million annually, operates in 50 countries providing custom shelter systems in remote sites for a wide variety of military, commercial and medical applications. In January, the company provided 140 temporary shelters in earthquake-ravaged Haiti.

The company recently signed a \$60-million four-year contract with the Department of National Defence to provide the Canadian military with 400 truck-mounted shelters, a variation of the company's MECCs (Mobile Expandable Container Configurations.)

The shelters, which will be built and outfitted in Burnaby, will be used for everything from kitchens to field



Ray Castelli is CEO of Weatherhaven, a Burnaby company that produces state-of-the-art shelters primarily for the military that can be used in extreme conditions, such as in Afghanistan.

hospitals, gymnasiums, and even post offices.

The contract is expected to provide more than 80 jobs in B.C. and the establishment of an additional manufacturing facility in Metro Vancouver.

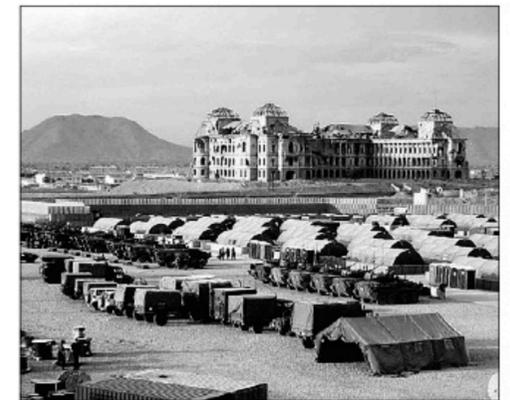
"It will mean improved logistics and higher-quality living conditions for the soldiers," said Castelli. "Not only will this program provide better equipment for our troops, but it is

also a clear example of how the Canada First Defence Policy can provide a major stimulus to the manufacturing sector in B.C."

The contract, part of a joint \$130-million deal with Dew Engineering in Ottawa (which will manufacture another 500 shelters), also involves Surrey-based Tri-Metal Fabricators, which will provide the metal frames for Weatherhaven's shelters.

Unlike previous shelter systems, the latest contract involves structures that can be used while attached to trucks or simply detached from the trucks in remote areas for use.

"They're shelters, but they look like shipping containers," said Castelli, who noted that these particular units won't be used as sleeping quarters. "They have built-in mechanical rooms, with on-board power generators,



Some of the Weatherhaven shelters deployed in Afghanistan.

water, air conditioning and such that the container can operate independently for weeks on its own. They can be used as kitchens, hospitals, command centres, or washroom and shower facilities.

"They can be used in Afghanistan, the Arctic, on peacekeeping missions, or for domestic emergencies."

Castelli noted that his company started out building shelters for use in extreme weather conditions in Canada's North, "providing First-World living conditions in minus-50 conditions."

The future, he added, is largely global. "We see a lot of opportunities in Africa, South America, and with the U.S. military. The military is becoming more mobile [and] our products are built to be mobile.

"And on the mining side, it's getting harder to find minerals and gas.

"If, for example, you have to move a camp with a pipeline across the Amazon, our style is made to be moved easily and quickly."

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