



Work on air compressors may create jobs in Franklin

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April 5, 2007

This isn't your everyday air compressor.

Grimmer Industries has to redesign the industrial machines for a customer who will take them to the far reaches of the world and test them like never before.

Plastic fenders are being replaced with metal. Extreme temperatures can't be a problem. Neither can dust.

The Franklin company got a contract to make \$7 million worth of air compressors for the U.S. Navy in the next three years. Eventually the work could create openings for 10 additional employees.

Franklin-based Grimmer Industries received an order from the Navy for 500 air compressors like this one. The military will use the heavy-duty compressors to supply air for tools, inflate tires and test air pressure in airplane cockpits.

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PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERSON

the Navy and Marine Corps.

But first, the company has to make five prototypes to withstand the Navy's rigorous tests, company president Timothy Hollingsworth said.

The Navy's air compressors must have heavy-duty radiators and work in dusty conditions, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The machines, which the Navy and Marine Corps will use to supply air for tools, inflate tires and test air pressure in cockpits, must run off four types of fuel because troops can't always get access to just one type. Helicopters must be able to pick up the compressors and move them, Hollingsworth said.

These details and more are spelled out in a 100-page agreement compiled by

"The Marine Corps is going to take them to some very nasty places," Hollingsworth said.

Along with the first five compressors, employees must prepare a training manual for using the product and a list of parts operators might need for repairs, Hollingsworth said.

After the Navy tests the product, Grimmer's contract calls for producing a maximum of 500 units in two years.

For the Franklin company of 75 employees, that means thousands of hours of additional work and possibly more employees, depending on how many compressors the Navy ends up purchasing.

An estimated 10 new jobs, including project manager, engineering support and assembly labor positions, could be added.

Production by company division GrimmerSchmidt Compressors will increase by a third if the Navy wants 500 compressors, Hollingsworth said.

Each air compressor requires 10 hours of assembly plus hours of labor to make the parts. A full order would call for more than 2,500 additional labor hours by workers, he said.

The military also requires a higher level of product testing.

GrimmerSchmidt has been making air compressors in Franklin since 1968. The company filled a similar U.S. Navy order for air compressors in the 1990s, Hollingsworth said.

During that project, the Navy ended up ordering more than the number of contracted compressors, he said.

The public bid process for this job started about eight months ago. Grimmer Industries, at 1015 N. Hurricane Road, learned it was awarded the contract Tuesday, and final adjustments to the agreement were finished Wednesday morning, Hollingsworth said.

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