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NORTH TONAWANDA



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University at Buffalo engineering students, from left, Tom Braun, Dave Johnson and Mathew Randall, assemble a tire log made from old tires in Re-Tread Products' North Tonawanda factory.

Schumer rubber-stamps effort of company researching tire log

BY ELMER FLOETZ

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Re-Tread Products last year got a \$200,000 grant for research on its "tire log" product.

Three weeks ago, the Great Valley-based company received something that could potentially prove even more valuable — the support of U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer.

Schumer has called on Federal Emergency Management Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials to meet with company officials to discuss how the still-in-development project could be used for flood control and levee construction in places like New Orleans.

"Everyone watched their televisions last fall, wondering what they could do to help after Hurricane Katrina," Schumer said in a statement. "RTP . . . is developing a material that will play a vital role in protecting communities nationwide in the near future.

"Companies like this are essential to the revitalization of the region, and I will continue to help with the necessary tools as research and development of the tire log continues."

At the moment, though, the company is creating its product in a North

Tonawanda factory on money from a New York State development grant.

Walk into the An-Cor Plastics plant, and you'll find half a dozen University at Buffalo engineering students doing much of the labor, putting the logs together, using winches to test just how much they'll bend under how much pressure and helping to figure out just how to put them together.

While the processes are in the patent pipeline and some of the information is proprietary, the idea is relatively simple: Slice the treaded part of steel-belted tires off, cut them, wrap them and turn them into "logs" that will bend, but not break.

While the product could prove invaluable in places like New Orleans, or in other places requiring retaining walls or sea walls or similar applications, the state grant is based on what it gets rid of: used tires.

The state estimates its citizens generate 18 million used tires a year, and disposal can be a huge problem. In 1995, an estimated 1 million-tire stockpile caught fire in the Chautauqua County community of Sinclairville, generating noxious smoke and fumes that spread across the region.

According to project manager Dave Johnson, Re-Tread's process has ad-

vantages over practices such as grinding tires up for use as filler (the metal then has to be extracted magnetically) or burning them (pollution problems). It's taking advantage of the tires' strength and flexibility instead of trying to break them down.

The tires' tend to keep their flexibility and have almost no chemical leachate, Johnson said, while they should outlast wooden structures.

They're also strong.

"I put 4,000 pounds pressure on it pulling, and it didn't come near breaking it," Johnson said, describing one of the tests on a 10-foot-long, approximately 8-inch-thick log. "It stretched 2 inches. And that (pressure) was as high as I could take the winch."

Re-Tread is planning to do more testing on the product.

The company's grant is for research and development, so it hasn't been able to buy the kind of large equipment it will need for production, although it's researching plans for equipment and factory design.

When the testing is completed, Johnson said, the business — whose CEO is Shane Hansen of Great Valley — should be able to start quickly.

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