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PITTSBURGH BUSINESSTIMES

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KB Industries hopes to show off its product in Pittsburgh area

Company's product aimed at fixing storm water, flood issues

Pittsburgh Business Times - by [Tim Schooley](#)

When it comes to its business goal of demonstrating the sustainable value of Flexi-Pave, a permeable surface material, Clearwater, Fla.-based KB Industries sees Pittsburgh and Allegheny County as one big, paved-over proving ground.

It's a place with topography gnarled by hills, rivers and creeks. It's a place where occasional floods submerge numerous small towns too often defenseless against them.

And it's a region so hopelessly outdated and ill-equipped to meet the Environmental Protection Agency Standards of the Clean Water Act that it's under a consent decree for failing to provide better storm water management.

For KB, a nine-year-old company looking to bring its recycled green product into mainstream usage, it all adds up to a great market opportunity.

So much so that the company is actively scouting the region for a location to establish its first manufacturing plant.

The plan calls for a facility that would seek to collect many of the nearly 10 million used-up tires in Pennsylvania and recycle them into a Flexi-Pave material strong enough to allow heavy motor vehicles to drive over it yet porous enough to allow rain water to practically gush through it.

"Pittsburgh is near the top of the list," said Trey Wylie, the chief operating officer of KB.

Calling the area extremely attractive, Wylie is speaking first of the region's great need to mitigate its storm water issues, a reality imposed by environmental issues and the legal requirements of Act 167, a state requirement mandating improved storm water management.

But he and the company's founder, Kevin Bagnall, a native of Sheffield, England, who invented and patented Flexi-Pave, sees the Pittsburgh area as more than a test market. Along with the region's often severe storm water needs, they also value Pittsburgh's traditional industrial strengths, such as close proximity to nearly half the American population, access to the cost-effective barge shipping on the region's rivers, a good work force and others.

After visiting a range of city, county and state officials in Pittsburgh a few weeks ago, the executive leadership of KB Industries continue to scout the area for a site on which to develop a new plant, and hopes to make a final decision by the end of the year. KB seeks 10- to 20-acre sites, potentially on brownfields such as the Carrie Furnace site in Braddock, an early candidate.

The plan is to set up a facility that mixes recycled waste tires with rock and a molding agent to create Flexi-Pave supply for both ground surface and in a molded application for use in roofs and other construction materials.

Pittsburgh was not on KB's radar until a few years ago, when Mount Washington-based consultant Bernie Lynch, working in the office of then-Mayor Bob O'Connor, reached out to the firm, interested not just in the value of KB's product but in its economic development potential for the region.

Lynch, now a consultant for KB Industries, remembers pitching Bagnall and Wylie: "We don't want to just buy it from you out of Florida. We want to build it here because we need a lot of it."

"They were a little blindsided by that," Lynch said. "They were not intending to do a plant in Pennsylvania. We've convinced him that Pittsburgh, because of the waterways system, would be a good location."

The company, which has established a network of between 200 and 250 licensed installers, has spent much of the past eight years developing its product to the point where it's proven itself and has a history of performance in parking lots and trails from Florida to the freeze-and-thaw climates of the North East.

While none of the product is underfoot here yet, KB is working with Carnegie Mellon University and expects to supply a number of projects in East Liberty.

John Hanger, the secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, sees an economic development opportunity that also could fit the mold of an environmental solution.

"I was impressed by the product," he said, seeing it as one of many different kinds of green recycled materials that can overturn an industrial eco-devotee perception that equates pollution with wealth and growth. "They can make money and employ people while improving



Kathleen Cabbie/Tampa Bay Business Journal

Kevin Bagnall is the founder of KB Industries and inventor of its core product, Flexi-Pave. The company is interested in finding a place in the Pittsburgh area to build a plant.

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the environment.”

Wylie has every reason to believe KB can set up an operation here and generate the kind of demand needed to justify a plant that would require an investment in equipment of between \$15 million and \$20 million.

“Once the product goes on the ground in a market, that’s when we typically see widespread adoption,” he said. “We’re confident if we can put the right components together, the labor will be there and the demand and the supply will follow along.”

KB Industries Inc.

- **Maker of permeable surface material Flexi-Pave**
- **BASED:** Clearwater, Fla.
- **EMPLOYEES:** 25 and growing
- **IN BUSINESS SINCE:** 2002
- **FOUNDER:** Kevin Bagnall
- **CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER:** Trey Wylie
- **INTERNET:** www.kbius.com
- **PRODUCT:** Flexi-Pave, invented by Bagnall, is made from recycled tires, aggregate rock and a proprietary bonding agent.
- **PITTSBURGH STATUS:** The company is scouting locations to potentially build a plant in the Pittsburgh area. “Pittsburgh is currently at the top of our list of locations where we would like to establish granulating and molding plants,” Wylie said. “We plan to have our choices narrowed down and selection completed during the first quarter of 2010.”

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