



Canflex

LOCAL COMPANY WITH A GLOBAL IMPACT

By John Brierley

Space X has revolutionized space travel by using reusable rockets. Many of the most expensive components can be reused, which makes space travel considerably more economical. The newest rocket, the Super Heavy, will be captured on its return to earth by “chopstick” arms on a 400-foot tower. Clearly, the chopstick arms need to absorb a lot of force and so the armatures must be tested to ensure that they can handle a load of 400 tons. **Canflex, located right here in Anacortes, makes the equipment to conduct this test!**

We’ve all seen the images on TV. There’s a raging forest fire. Forest Service helicopters hover over a lake, dipping a huge bucket into the water and then dumping it on the fire. **Canflex makes some of those buckets.**



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Remember the Deepwater Horizon? It was the largest marine oil spill in history in the Gulf of Mexico, caused by an explosion on an oil rig. Leaking petroleum formed an oil slick covering more than 57,500 square miles. Dispersants were applied to the slick to enable clean up. Given the vast area, booms were deployed to corral portions of the slick so the contained oil could either be siphoned or burned off. **Canflex provided equipment to contain about 800,000 gallons of spilled oil.**

When people ask Mike Brisack, Production Manager at Canflex, what he does for a living, he replies modestly "flexible containment," which generally elicits blank stares. The complete answer would be a mouthful! According to their brochure, "Canflex (USA) is a major manufacturer of high frequency welded products made with special high strength PVC or Urethane coated fabrics, such as polyester, nylon and Kevlar." Their large product range can be summarized as Oil Spill and Environmental Response, Bulk Storage Tanks & Transportation, Buoyancy & Underwater Lift Bags & Salvage, Load Test Bags & Load Measuring.

The last category was what interested Space X. Canflex test bags are attached to the "chopsticks" then filled with water to create 400 tons of load. Once the test is complete, the bags can be emptied and re-used for the next test which is considerably more convenient than using giant concrete blocks. Mike mentioned that Space X was environmentally conscious about not wasting a single drop of water harvested from the bags. Load test bags are also used to certify cranes in multiple locations like construction sites, aboard Coast Guard cutters etc.

Canflex is owned by Fernando Yopez, who gained his degrees in industrial and mechanical engineering in his native Ecuador and at the University of Washington. He has 23 years' experience designing and manufacturing PVC or Urethane (Poly or Nylon) flexible containment fuel systems, military fuel bladders, water systems, weight load testing, and oil spill containment systems. Mike Brisack has been with the company for 29 years and manages a crew of 15 production workers in two warehouses comprising about 30,000 square feet. If you walk or bike the Tommy Thompson Trail, you have passed close to their facility on 30th St. Once in a while, a curious passerby (like myself) will wander into the facility. Mike does not discourage them. "People enjoy seeing what we do," he told me, "It's fun...big stuff. Like the circus is going on."

Another impressive product in the Canflex line-up is the "Sea Slug", (see photo). It's a floating bladder that can be towed at sea, used for transporting & storing bulk liquids. They have been used in disaster relief to provide potable water for populations affected by tsunamis, earthquakes etc. They have also been used for oil spill vessels with limited storage capacity.

The range of customers for Canflex products is as varied as their product lines: the Coast Guard, governments, Space X, oil companies, relief agencies, shipping companies, etc. Since Mike does all the training on Canflex products, he has traveled

Canflex boom at our local refinery makes a great napping spot!



the world. I asked him to name a few places and he rattled off, "Morocco, Brazil, Portugal, Australia, Tasmania, Russia, all over the US...that's just a few of them." I wondered if he realized how much travel would be involved when he signed on 29 years ago. "No way, and I didn't even know what 'flexible containment' was!"

One important worldwide customer we haven't mentioned is the military. Canflex produces a line of TCB's specially for the military. That's Transportable Collapsible Bladders, primarily used for fuel storage anywhere from 500 gallons to 5,000. They are designed for use on all kinds of vehicles from aircraft to military vehicles to ocean-going vessels. One example is a contract Canflex has with the US Airforce to provide aerial fuel bladders for the delivery of bulk fuel for rapid dispense to ground-based equipment and troops in the field.

Canflex is the perfect example of a local company, operating on a global scale, providing good jobs for Anacortes residents, that has largely gone under the radar. For a more complete picture, please visit their website at www.canflexinc.com

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