

## Fluorochemicals: Halocarbon Legacy Thrives in Modern World

Robert Ehrenfeld, a pioneering U.S. chemist, played an integral role in the development of fluorine-based materials for the Manhattan Project- the first atomic weapons program - in the 1940s. He then discovered that no company could readily supply the fluorine compounds the project required. By 1950, Ehrenfeld had founded Halocarbon and was manufacturing and supplying the compounds himself-albeit from a garage with equipment purchased using government grants. In the early days of the business Ehrenfeld had so many roles in the firm that he even designed all of the reactions to run independently so that he could also answer the phone.

From such humble beginnings privately owned Halocarbon (River Edge, NJ) has today become a steadily growing, mid-size provider of fluorine compounds, generating sales in the tens of millions of dollars, and run by a staff of about 150. "Sales were up some in 2009, but not spectacularly so," says CEO Peter Murin. The market outlook for the company "is getting better," however, Murin says. "I am still not dancing a jig because the future is a little cloudy - but we have made it through the recession without laying off staff."

Halocarbon: Land to expand onto at its site in North Augusta.



The link between the Halocarbon of the 1950s and the modern day business is not only the continued focus on fluorine chemistry but a culture of wanting to provide elegant chemistry solutions-an approach epitomised today by the firm's technical director Barry Jones. "The long term aim is keep the company in a position where it can continue to answer the questions that the customers come to us with," says Emily Ehrenfeld, Robert Ehrenfeld's daughter, and president of the company, who jointly owns the firm with her two sisters. "The goal is not world domination. We want to keep the quality of our staff, technology, and management."

The company has three product areas; specialty fluorochemicals; inert oils and greases – the original part of the business; and inhalation anaesthetics. In the anaesthetics field the company is "seeing some growth" in sales from sivofluorine, a relatively new anaesthetic product, Murin says. The company is now contemplating a further expansion in this area.

Halocarbon provides a range of custom specialty fluorochemicals for applications ranging from pharmaceuticals to electronics. The company is seeing an "increasing interest" in the use of compounds for coatings and photoresist applications. "It's not a big business but we are seeing a lot of samples go out and we are having a lot of discussions on chemicals. A year ago we did not have a lot of enquiries" in this area, Murin says.

The company has spare land available at its site in North Augusta, South Carolina to build a second manufacturing facility adjacent to its main plant, but remains cautious when it comes to capital investment and says it would rather spend the money on equipment. "The cash is there - but its step-by-step growth – not a big leap that would require large amount of cash. Financing is from earnings," Murin says. Some 40-50% of the company's sales are generated via exports. "We are now relatively geographically diverse, which is a good thing. We have seen some migration of business overseas-but in part this is because some of our customers' business has migrated there." U.S. pharmaceutical companies are among those to have relocated activities to lower cost countries. Halocarbon ships product to their new locations. "We can follow them out there," Murin says.

Robert Ehrenfeld: In pursuit of 'elegant' chemistry.



Expanding beyond fluorochemicals is not considered to be an option because of the potential risks involved. "We will stay doing what we do well," Emily Ehrenfeld says. "My sense now is that there is a real need and value in fluorochemicals."

Robert Ehrenfeld, who died in October 2007, was "a humble man, who was constantly surprised that the business went as well as it did. He was more interested in chemistry – in providing elegant answers of chemistry rather than creating a large business," Emily Ehrenfeld says. It is sixty years ago this year that the company was founded. The company culture first instilled by Robert Ehrenfeld all those years ago certainly appears to be thriving. Not only that-it is also proving now more than ever to be a good approach to business.

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