

## Plastic Research Corporation Protects Precious Cargo



By Jennifer Sikorski,  
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**CF: How many employees do you have?**

**RB:** There are 130.

**CF: What is the nature of your business?**

**RB:** We're in the container business. We make fiberglass containers mostly. We started in 1973 with the Phoenix missile container and the highlight containers. We make containers for the Maverick missiles, the Phoenix, the Harpoon, and most recently the cruise missiles, and JDAM. We make the containers for shipping the tail kits. We can build anything that can be built out of fiberglass, although we don't stick our toe into tubs, showers or a lot of the established commercial product lines. You'd classify us as a mid-tech, aerospace company.

**CF: What is your company's niche?**

**RB:** Shipping and storage container total service. We design and qualify and manufacture specialized containers for delicate military hardware.

**CF: How did you get started in the industry?**

**RB:** I was working at Hughes Aircraft when this company started up, and I wanted to get into a small company. I answered an ad for an engineering manager, and things just worked out.

**CF: How did you get started in the aircraft industry?**

**RB:** Before that, I had been working at North American Aviation, it was called at the time. We had just about finished up with the Apollo program, and the engineering portion was winding down. Hughes Aircraft was hiring like crazy, and it actually involved outfitting mobile shelters with electronics, computers, radar. That turned out to be a great place to work until I wanted to move onto a small company and have more of a say in things.

**CF: Did you face any problems when getting started in the industry?**

**RB:** Getting potential customers to consider change. Most of the military users were comfortable with steel and aluminum, and they weren't really anxious to change materials. Some of that still exists today in spite of all the FRP applications across the board in aerospace and automotive. For instance, in the marine industry, up to a certain length they don't make boats out of anything except fiberglass. But still, there is a certain difficulty for some people to make

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change. So we have customers, particularly in the Navy, who think, 'Well, it's not made out of aluminum, so it doesn't count.' There's one customer that we'd like to break into, but they believe you have to make containers out of steel. I think that's the biggest impediment to getting started, but we've made inroads, because when it comes to comparisons, aluminum and steel don't offer near the value the fiberglass containers do.

**CF: Do you face any obstacles in the regulatory arena?**

**RB:** It's a constant battle. It really threatens businesses, to be regulated the way we are. We have our wonderful EPA, that's overlapped by the AQMD (Air Quality Management District), and OSHA loves to make things difficult, workman's comp, 8.3 percent sales tax, medical group insurance, socialist politicians, and now OPEC—they drive the

price of crude up arbitrarily, and everything made out of crude follows. Plastic requires byproducts of crude. It's not that everything's impossible, it's that the cumulative effect takes a lot of your time. Think about it: When you earn \$100 and you pay your state and federal income tax, you take what's left and go spend it, you lose 8.3 percent of that because of state sales tax. It's pretty incredible what you're left with. Small companies are in the same place as people who have to balance their own checkbooks.

**CF: Can you describe your marketing efforts?**

**RB:** We do most of it by staying in touch with our known and proven customers. We have one marketing person and two manufacturer reps, so we stay in contact with all branches of the service and the companies that would be prime contractors in development programs, like Boeing and Lockheed, and we know people inside those companies that we do business with. We also watch the "Business Commerce Daily," which is a government-published document that lists all the contracts that are being put out with requests for quotes and proposals.

**CF: What developments or research would you like to see happen to improve the industry?**

**RB:** Short term, if the resin and gel coat manufacturers could further reduce their VOCs, it would make it easier for manufacturing companies to comply with the QMD EPA requirements. In the long term, it would make it nice for manufacturers if oil consumption as fuel could be reduced. That would create a buyer's market for byproducts of crude because it would not all be burned up; there would be plenty of it around for making plastics and resins.

*("Pulling Strings" continues on p. 45)*