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Made in Milwaukee: Milwaukee Sprayer provides green solutions

By [Kay Nolan](#), for BizTimes
Published [June 10, 2011](#)

Milwaukee Sprayer Manufacturing Co. Inc.

N90-W14337 Commerce Drive, Menomonee Falls

Industry: Pressurized sprayer and nozzle components, fuel injection cleaning equipment

Employees: About 30

www.sureshotsprayer.com



Long before "climate change" and "global warming" were household terms, Milwaukee Sprayer Manufacturing Co. was designing and producing a product line that enables auto repair shops and other users of spray liquids to stop using hundreds of aerosol cans a year.

And that's been a great selling point for the Menomonee Falls company since the 1970s, when the industrial world became aware of environmental concerns, such as the release of fluorocarbons from aerosol cans into the atmosphere.

Then came the Great Recession, and Milwaukee Sprayer's top selling point has become, "Our products are saving customers significant amounts of money."

But it doesn't hurt that there is a renewed emphasis these days on environmental concerns.

Milwaukee Sprayer's Sure Shot gadgets are used at auto shops, oil change centers and other facilities that use large amounts of liquid chemicals, such as brake fluid, degreasers, heavy-duty cleaners, etc. The sprayers allow the customers to buy the chemicals in bulk drums, instead of in multiple small aerosol cans.

The cost savings are obvious, as is the drastic reduction in landfill trash.

"We all buy aerosol cans and when they're empty, we throw them in the garbage," says Ron Nielsen, who runs the company with his partner and brother-in-law, Alan Rohrick. "A guy who goes through 500 cans in a month would be better off buying (the chemical) in a large container. Our sprayers work just like an aerosol to apply a pressurized spray. The difference is, we're not putting any propellants in the atmosphere -- we use just clean air -- and nothing gets thrown away; you reuse it over and over. Once customers figure out they can fill and pressurize our sprayers themselves, we usually have them for life."

Auto mechanics are usually delighted to discover the product exists, Nielsen said. And more are finding out, thanks to the Internet and a company website. "Previously, we had to spread the word through trade shows and in trade magazines. People would come up to our booth and say, "Wow, what a great idea! I wish you'd thought of this five years ago."

That makes Nielsen and Rohrick chuckle, because Milwaukee Sprayer has been around since 1932. Nielsen and Rohrick's father-in-law, Vernon Koepf, took over the company in 1976 after working there 10 years. Koepf passed away a few years ago, but his wife, Beverly, is still active in the company.

The company moved from Milwaukee's northwest side to a Menomonee Falls industrial park in 2004. The steel and brass sprayers and nozzles are made by hand and carefully tested for air-tightness. They are able to withstand 600 psi of pressure, far more than the 200 psi maximum most customers need, but because they handle chemicals, safety is paramount. In the company's 79-year history, there has never been litigation over



Milwaukee Sprayer Manufacturing Co., Inc.

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anyone being injured by its product, Nielsen said.

Milwaukee Sprayer makes a point of using Wisconsin vendors. Specially coated steel canisters are made in Onalaska. Sprayer handles are made in Germantown and then copper-plated in Sheboygan.

Solid brass fittings are made at the Menomonee Falls plant, which assembles between 2,000 and 2,500 sprayers each week.

Large automobile dealers and big box retailers that offer auto service are becoming especially interested in a new line of Sure Shot sprayers under development that will automatically set the pressure, Nielsen said. If that niche takes off, Milwaukee Sprayer hopes to expand employment.

The plant has about 30 employees now. The company did reduce its workforce about 20 percent because of the recession. "We felt it like everybody else," said Nielsen.

To survive during tough economic times, the company searches for niche customers, keeping in mind that anything that can be found in an aerosol can is a potential use for its sprayers.

NASA bought 250 Sure Shot sprayers to clean space shuttles. A Hollywood filmmaker used the Wisconsin product to spray fake blood from an actor's neck. "The market is almost endless," said Nielsen. "In tough times, that helps."

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