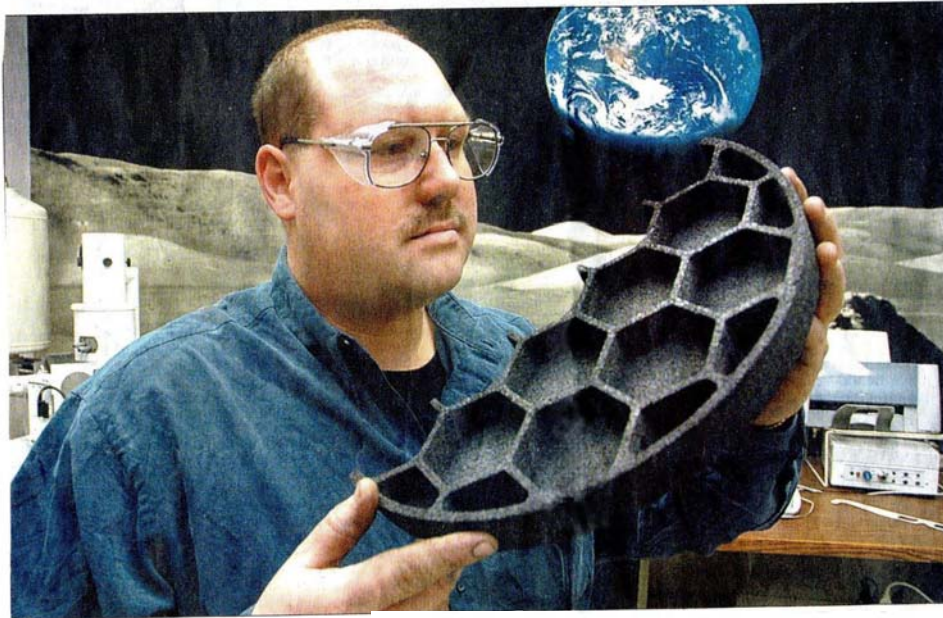


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Left, Rob Nolte, maintenance operator at Touchstone Research Laboratory in Triadelphia, holds a piece of CFOAM machined for a light mirror in a space application. Below, Jason Roth, a technician at Touchstone Research Laboratory, moves a pallet of CFOAM that soon will be shipped.

Photo by Scott McCloskey

The Latest In Technology Plant To Be Built Near Touchstone in Ohio County



WHEELING — Touchstone Research Laboratory, in partnership with the Regional Economic Development Partnership, the state of West Virginia and the U.S. Department of Defense, has announced plans to build a new facility for production of a material made from coal.

Elizabeth Kraftician and Brian Joseph, founders of Touchstone, announced that a new plant will be built next to the existing facility in Triadelphia.

It will produce larger quantities of CFOAM, which is a material made from coal that has a wide range of applications from ships and aircrafts to fuel

cells and tornado/panic rooms. CFOAM is inexpensive, lightweight, fire-resistant, impact absorbing and can be thermally insulating or conducting.

It has been under development since 1998.

Since that time, manufacturing processes have been refined and extensive testing has been conducted to characterize the material's unique properties.

Joseph said that work has already begun to prepare the site along Middle Wheeling Creek Road, adjacent to Interstate 70.

He said Touchstone considered several West Virginia sites and fielded inquiries from potential partners that wanted Touchstone to build its CFOAM plant outside of West Virginia.

"It just made sense to stay where our roots are," Joseph said. "We started Touchstone in West Virginia and it feels right to stay here. It also makes sense to locate the production facility in proximity to where research will continue, so that production will benefit from continued innovation."

The new 43,000-square-foot facility will eventually provide jobs for 30 additional employees as Touchstone expands to meet a growing demand from the U.S. Department of Defense and private cus-

tomers planning to use CFOAM in aerospace applications. Joseph said he expects the first phase of construction to be complete by June.

Kraftician said CFOAM is the result of research by a team of Touchstone engineers and experts. The research was made possible by ongoing support from U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., who recognized the value of the foam for defense purposes.

The new plant is being built by RED, which will lease it to Touchstone. The West Virginia Economic Development Authority approved a \$2.3 million loan to the partnership for the project on Thursday.

"This is a project we can be proud of,"

Gov. Bob Wise said. "It means more quality manufacturing and high technology jobs. We look forward to Touchstone's continued success with this coal-based product. It is a natural for our state."

Don Rigby, executive director of the partnership, echoed the governor's comments. "This is an important new development for Ohio County. CFOAM will be making a national and international impact, and we are fortunate that Touchstone's leadership has been committed to keeping its expansion efforts based in West Virginia."

CFOAM already has been produced in a variety of forms from thin sheets to 3D components. The material can be cut, milled and turned with conventional

equipment and tooling. It can accommodate metalized coatings and fasteners and can be integrated with other materials including resins and laminates.

The U.S. Navy is interested in CFOAM for bulkheads on ships. Federal Missile Defense Agency researchers believe CFOAM can be an important part of their efforts.

The aerospace industry also is investigating the product for use as tools or molds to make composite aircraft parts.

Kraftician and Joseph said they believe CFOAM can be a major player in the materials world and expressed gratitude to Byrd, West Virginia's economic development leadership and RED for ongoing support of CFOAM's development.