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Touchstone Research Laboratory, a cutting-edge West Virginia materials research company, has received a prestigious national award by a top panel of independent judges for its work in developing a new material for use by the aerospace industry.

Touchstone of Triadelphia, WV, received the esteemed *R&D 100 Award* from *R&D Magazine* for developing what the magazine judged to be one of the top 100 “technologically significant” new products introduced to the market place in 2003. The subject of the recognition was Touchstone’s CFOAM material that is now being used to make the tools or molds that are used to construct composite parts for new aircraft.

Company founders Elizabeth Kraftician and Brian Joseph accepted the award in national ceremonies at Chicago’s Navy Pier. Key researchers from Touchstone also attended the event.

Touchstone’s CFOAM is a new structural material made from coal, which is strong, inexpensive, lightweight, and fire-resistant. CFOAM can also be machined with conventional equipment, but Joseph pointed out that one of its most important qualities that makes it ideal for use in manufacturing new airplane parts is its low thermal expansion.

“Instead of aluminum or other metals, new airplane parts are being created out of a combination of materials and those are called composites,” Joseph explained. “To make those parts, you must have a mold or tool that does not change shape when you place the composites in them. Until now the only material that could hold its shape in the composite part process was heavy and expensive. CFOAM is light, inexpensive and holds its shape in composite part making.”

CFOAM became available for the composite tooling market in 2003 and it was that introduction and success that caught the attention of *R&D Magazine*. The magazine annually commissions a team of experts to look over candidate technologies in a search for what it determines to be the world’s most technologically significant new products introduced to the market place over the past year.

Selection to be one of the *R&D Magazine* winners involves having products reviewed by a panel of nearly 50 independent technical experts that compare the details of the products to currently existing products and technologies. This year's winners came from North America, Europe and Asia.

“We were honored to be among the people who received the award,” Kraftician said. “We accepted it on behalf of Touchstone and the people there who made CFOAM such a success.

Touchstone Research Laboratory was established in 1980 in Wheeling with the mission of providing world-class materials testing and industrial problem solving services to U.S. manufacturers. Building on its success, Touchstone leveraged its broad industry experience, modern laboratory facilities, and creative human resources to win several Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) proposals — spawning a growing activity in the research and development of advanced materials.