

May 22, 2010

Local company pitching in with machines to clean Gulf oil spill

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Jerry Peer Jr. was notified May 14 that he'd need to put in some 15-hour days for employer Steam Cleaners Inc. over the next few days to fill an emergency order for an important customer.

"All these long nights, it didn't even bother me, because I knew where they were going and what they were going to do," Peer said. "I'm really impressed and proud to be a part of that." What the service manager was doing early last week was helping to assemble three high-pressure hot water sprayers designed especially for the cleanup of the ongoing Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

Oil has been leaking into the ocean since April 22, which was two days after an oil rig leased by BP exploded, leaving 11 workers missing and presumed dead. Six locally made cleaning machines were mounted on three 18-foot trailers Wednesday and hauled to Theodore, Ala., **Patriot's Decontamination and Staging area**, where they are being used to hose down rocks, shoreline and other cleaning equipment.

Steam Cleaners is based in Fresno, but has a sales office and plant in Bakersfield where the units were designed and assembled. The company has a longtime relationship with the oil industry because its products are used to clean oil rigs and platforms, among other things.

"We're one of thousands of companies that sell cleaning equipment, but they needed something fast and I could get it to that spot inside of a week and a half," Johnson said.

"They" is **Patriot Environmental**, a Long Beach company that specializes in industrial cleaning and emergency response services.

Johnson declined to say how much **Patriot** paid for the custom-designed system, but said "it's our biggest order of the year, about half of what a normal month would be in regard to dollars."

Walt Dorn is Director of Emergency Response for Patriot, which was hired by Marine Spill Response Corporation almost immediately after the disaster began.

Patriot has employees from Bakersfield who were familiar with Steam Cleaners' work and knew the company could turn around an emergency custom order fast. Plus, it was a strategic business move. "It is our intent as we grow into the San Joaquin Valley to

source as much equipment as we can locally," Dorn wrote in an e-mail sent from the field in Alabama.

Steam Cleaners engineers worked almost non-stop to design the water feed system. Each of the three trailers has a 550-gallon water tank (up from 300 gallons normally) and is capable of dispersing 3,500 pounds of water pressure. A steam unit heats the water to 300 degrees, which is well past boiling point. There are generators on the trailers, allowing workers to hook up lights and work at night. And normally 50-foot hoses were made 200 feet. Even as the company was doing everything it could to give its new system more juice, if you will, it had to be careful not to make it too complex, said Jerry Peer Sr., father of the company's service manager and general manager of the Bakersfield office.

"Most of the people working out there are local people who don't have any experience using this type of equipment, so we wanted to make it really simple to use," he said. It is **Patriot's** standard practice to hire the bulk of its emergency response staff from the area it is working in, Dorn said. "We find that by doing this, we can provide the very best service because the personnel we employ locally have an actual interest in seeing to it that the place they call home gets their very best efforts," he said. "**Patriot**" also feels very strongly that it is the right thing to do to give back to the affected people in the affected area."

The elder Peer drove out with the equipment along with two other Steam Cleaners employees.

"It's quite a thrill," he said Wednesday as they prepared for their 32-hour drive to Alabama. "I was pretty excited when we got the order, to know we'd be able to do a little bit to help."