

## **Safeway Products Inc.**

Rockford-based employer Safeway Products Inc. has recently added to their staff because of increased sales through the federal General Service Administration (GSA) Advantage! Web site.

Founded in 1951, Safeway Products manufactures safety cans and storage cabinets to store flammable liquids such as gasoline, kerosene or fuel oil. The company's safety cans, made of corrosion resistant tern plated steel, are designed to automatically relieve internal build up pressure thus preventing explosion and personal injury. Metal safety cans range in size from one to five gallons.

Tom Lynde and his partner Phillip Fillweber bought the company, then called Safe-T-Way Cooper Industries, from the owner in October 2002. At the time, the company employed ten workers. The partners decided that they wanted to grow the company by adding to its existing product line with spill containment products made of polyethylene. As a result of increased sales, the company now employs 25 people. The firm recently moved from their old 12,000 square foot location in Rockton, to a new 52,000 square foot facility in Rockford. The firm sells its products nationally through a 1200 person distribution network, and has ten sales representatives.

After Lynde and his partner purchased the company, they began analyzing their sales and noticed consistent sales to federal government agencies, but there was no coordinated effort to go after those accounts. After making investments to increase production and other improvements, they decided to focus on government contracting as one avenue to increase sales.

"We went to some seminars about selling to the government" said Mr. Lynde "but found the information to be overwhelming. The system is cumbersome and hard to work with" he said.

For advice on how to get started in government contracting, they met with Ann Johns, the Procurement Technical Assistance Center counselor at Rock Valley College. The Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at Rock Valley College is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network and is supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the US Small Business Administration. Ms. Johns explained that the Government Services Administration (GSA) had recently become a major supplier of safety cans, and if Safeway Products wanted to sell to the government, they needed to be listed on the GSA Advantage! Web site. This meant submitting materials about their company and products, to GSA to obtain a Multiple Award Contract.

Mr. Lynde and Ms. Johns worked for approximately seven months preparing materials for submission to GSA. Within a few months after submitting their package, the company was successful in receiving a Multiple Award Contract for five years.

Today Safeway Products can be found on the GSA Advantage! web site, the federal government's vast on-line shopping and ordering system. For Safeway Products' government clients, the GSA Advantage! web site is the quickest, easiest way to order safety cans. When placing orders, government buyers no longer need to seek further competition, gather requirements or make a separate determination of fair and reasonable pricing. Government buyers benefit from the best value and the lowest overall cost alternative.

"All of this assistance took time, but did not cost anything" said Mr. Lynde. "Ann made it so easy." "Getting on the GSA Advantage! Web site, takes between six months and a year. The client has to be very dedicated and put in the time to meet all of the requirements," said Ms. Johns. "Safeway Products did a great job."

After getting the contract, Ms. Johns continued to assist the company to explain how to implement their contract and offered general marketing assistance. As a result, the firm is starting to advertise in the monthly publication called *GSA MarkeTips* which is geared to government procurement officers.

Within a few months of being listed on the GSA Advantage! Web site, Safeway Products has seen an increase of \$250,000 in sales to government agencies, and they expect this trend to continue.

"We are in a city that has some of the highest unemployment in the state, but as a manufacturer, we are growing" said Mr. Lynde. "We plan to hire additional people for our plant within the next 90 days in addition to the person we hired last week. We are happy with the sales we have gotten so far from the GSA Advantage! web site and are looking forward" to hiring more people.

The Rock Valley College Procurement Technical Assistance Center is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network, working in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Small Business Development Center and the U.S. Small Business Administration.