

Granger takes on molding storm shelters

By Angie DeRosa
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Jim Cravens will admit that a 960-pound plastic storm shelter has its processing challenges.

"Because of its size, it basically maxes out our Ferry 400 [rotomolding machine]," said the vice president of sales and engineering for Middletown, Ohio-based Granger Plastics. "Honestly, it's the largest part I've seen fit on a Ferry 400. Because it's a double-walled container, the walls are relatively close together. Making sure the flow was proper inside the mold, that was a challenge in and of itself."

But Cravens and the team at Granger are tapping a growing market. In fact, just this year, companies such as theirs received a boost from the govern-

ment: the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 247 in March, which allocates \$50 million for the development of storm shelters in communities. The Federal Emergency Management Agency must approve the shelters.

Granger Plastics is using the rotational molding process to make the shelters from compounded linear low density polyethylene.

"We're kind of on the front end of federal funding," Cravens said. Asked about what sort of sales-boost the company anticipates, he said, "We don't know what to expect."

Despite not knowing what is ahead, the manufacturer will invest \$4 million in total expansions during the next year. It already added 10,000 square feet to its current facility in Middletown,

and plans may include tacking on an additional 30,000-40,000 square feet. The company would add one more rotomolding machine at the Middletown location, Cravens said.

The company also has its sights set on erecting a facility in Alabama, where storm shelters will be the primary focus, he said. If all goes well, Granger will build a 100,000-square-foot plant in the home state of the congressman who introduced HR 247.

Currently, Granger distributes its storm shelters to stores such

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as Home Depot through Danville, Ala.-based Applied Solar Technology Inc.

For seven years the company produced fiberglass underground storm shelters. Just last year, they made the decision to switch to PE.

"We just could not keep up with the demand building them in fiberglass," said Brent Mitchell, vice president of Applied Solar Technology. "We were looking at being able to greatly increase our productivity and quality. Both have increased for us, and it's even better."

Mitchell would not disclose his company's sales. However, Cravens said Granger is on pace for about \$6.5 million in sales this year, \$2 million above 2000's sales.

"That's not counting what the storm shelters are doing," he said. The Middletown facility also rotomolds products for the food, recreational and medical markets.