

# The Gazette

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## Defence department contract brings Stedfast body armour business

### Developing help for troops in Afghanistan

MIKE KING  
THE GAZETTE

An Eastern Townships company that rose to the top of the rubberized fabrics market in the early 1990s, then struggled to survive at the beginning of the new millennium, has bounced back to become a developer of body armour for military personnel.

Rob Kellock, chief executive officer of Stedfast Inc., said personal protection equipment now accounts for more than 75 per cent of company's \$27 million in annual sales.

"We are now a leader in flexible barrier materials (used in protective clothing)" Kellock said yesterday from Stedfast's headquarters in Granby, where the firm was founded in 1930.

Stedfast recently landed an \$850,000 contract from the Department of National Defence to come up with enhanced personal protection for soldiers in Afghanistan against improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

According to the department's website, 20 of the 60 soldiers killed in Afghanistan between April 2002 and last week died in IED attacks or roadside bombings.

Kellock said Stedfast's track record with the military and first responders - police, firefighters, ambulance technicians and emergency medical assistants - made the latest contract "a natural for us to go after."



TYREL FEATHERSTONE - THE GAZETTE

**Rob Kellock, president and CEO of Stedfast, with some final protection products at the plant in Granby.**

As well, Stedfast's breathable textiles have already been used by other manufacturers to make tents and uniforms for Canadian troops in Afghanistan. And the same material is used to make protective gear for other uses where there's a need for breathable clothing that's both functional and can repel germs, flames or water.

Originally owned by the Stedfast Rubber Co. of Boston, the plant was a supplier to the shoe, bookbinding and travel-bag sectors.

It transformed itself into a specialized manufacturer of high-tech fabrics after it was bought by a group of Canadian investors in 1979.

The company is moving closer and closer to what Kellock called "cut and sew" partners as the requirements of our military become more demanding.

Francois Simard, vice-president of research and development, said R&D is still

"a very small part of our business - 5 to 10 per cent - but growing."

The 12-member R&D team is getting more involved in prototypes and next-generation personal protection equipment, Simard added.

With the increasing number of military contracts alone, mostly from the Defence Department, but also from the U.S. and Britain, Stedfast is leaving behind what Kellock referred to as "the challenging period we went through from 2000 to 2002."

He recalled the company was "spending a lot of money on R&D and not bringing much in" during that time.

Stedfast now has more than 100 employees in Granby and at its Charlotte, N.C., facility that specializes in a key component in seals, gaskets and roofing membranes.

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