

Irvine company joins aerospace influx in Baja

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Baja California has gained another global aerospace-industry player, with Eaton Aerospace joining Eaton Corp.'s electrical group in establishing manufacturing operations in Tijuana.

The aerospace group, with its headquarters in Irvine, makes components for commercial and military aircraft and expects to employ 650 to 700 workers in Baja by next year.

"Baja California currently has 26 aerospace companies and employs 60 percent of aerospace workers in Mexico. We thought we would be able to avail ourselves of an aerospace-skilled work force in Baja California," said Mike Nieves, the group's director of operational excellence.

Eaton Aerospace is sharing a building with Eaton Electrical in the Pacifico Industrial Park in southern Tijuana.

Both groups are part of Eaton Corp., a diversified industrial manufacturer with sales in 2005 of \$11.1 billion. The corporation has 59,000 employees and sells products to customers in more than 125 countries.

Two years ago the electrical group acquired the operations of Powerware, which had been manufacturing in Tijuana for 15 years, said Keith Rigby, Eaton Electrical's director of marketing and communication. It employs about 225 workers in Tijuana who make single-phase uninterruptible power systems for the information technology market.

Eaton Aerospace ranks "in the middle of the pack" of aviation component suppliers, Nieves said.

The company is consolidating operations that had been performed in Sarasota, Fla.; Aurora, Colo.; Phelps, N.Y.; and Wimborne, England, Nieves said.

The components the company will manufacture include electrical products, metal tubes, solenoid valves and air ducts. Many of the parts are hand-assembled, requiring a lot of machining and range from very large pieces to very small ones.

The components are used in aircraft from the Airbus A380, the largest commercial aircraft, to the Embraer Phenom 100, one in the new generation of light jets.

Additional customers include Boeing, Gulfstream and Lockheed Martin.

The plant began manufacturing July 25 with 30 operators and will end the year with 200 employees, Nieves said. Equipment that required "a sizable investment" has been installed.

"We've been extremely pleased with the type of talent we've attracted," he said.

Many locations along Mexico's border and in the interior courted the company, he said. The country is eager

to attract aerospace operators to replace manufacturing that was lost during a *maquiladora* industry crisis earlier in the decade.

Mexico also is trying to establish Federal Aviation Administration certification.

“That would certainly help our business. We would be able to ship directly to our customers,” Nieves said. Until certification can be completed in Mexico, the company needs to ship products to Irvine for the process to be completed.

Bombardier, the huge Canadian designer and manufacture of aviation and other products, established operations in the central Mexican state of Queretaro last year, and the plant turned out its first airplane fuselage in May.

Eaton Aerospace chose Baja California, Nieves said, because of its general proximity to Irvine and because it has a local work force skilled in making consumer electronics. Many of those operations were among the companies that left the state in the early part of the decade.

“Aerospace works very well in that environment because we share so many skill sets,” he said.

Nieves said he is encouraging several of the company's suppliers in the U.S. interior and in foreign countries to follow Eaton Aerospace to Baja California.

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