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Bright lights, big business

Increasing demand for its internationally recognised products has seen Launceston Hazard Systems Pty Ltd grow from a one-man operation to a successful exporter employing more than 40 people.

Established in 1987 by Richard Ireland, Hazard Systems is Australia's only manufacturer producing both sirens and lightbars for emergency warning vehicles and is among the world's top 10 manufacturers in its field.

Managing Director Brenton Heath said that the company designed and manufactured complete vehicle systems including LED message displays and flashing headlight devices, and supplies most Australian police, fire and ambulance services. Exporting has also become a major focus in recent years.

"We moved into exporting in 1999 after we developed a new warning light system that complied with Australian, United States and European standards," Mr Heath said.

"Now we're exporting to the US, UK, Germany, Egypt, Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, India, Malaysia, New Zealand and China."

Mr Heath said that the company's exports were increasing rapidly – growing by an average of 100 per cent each year for the last three years - and accounted for nearly 30 per cent of its turnover in 2003-04.

"Nearly all our expansion between 1999 and 2004 can be attributed to exports. We've always regarded export markets as the key to the ongoing success of the company, so all of our product development is driven by our global marketing plan."

Hazard Systems' stunning export performance has been recognised through receipt of a 1997 Telstra Small Business Award, 2000 Tasmanian Emerging Exporter Award and the 2002 Premier's Tasmanian Exporter of the Year Award.

In November 2003, Hazard Systems was acquired by US company Electronic Controls Co (Ecco) Ltd, also the parent company of Vision Alert Ltd UK. Hazard Systems has been able to fill the product gaps of these companies and use their extensive distribution and marketing resources across the UK, US, Europe and the Americas.

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The company's performance has led to the expansion of its workforce - up 20 per cent from 35 people in 2002 to 41 in 2004 - and premises. The factory layout has been modified, new raw materials storage has added, new subcontractors commissioned and major expansion plans are already being considered.

Mr Heath said that the Tasmanian Government's Department of Economic Development was a source of ongoing support and advice as Hazard Systems continued to expand.

The company's exporting activities have been supported by the Export Marketing Assistance Scheme and it received funding through the Tasmanian Innovations Program, which led to the development of the new LED product range.

"We've also received assistance from the Enterprise Improvement Program that's enabled us to conduct a technology review and secure ISO 9001 certification, which strengthened our international position. The certification also helped us secure a \$600,000 contract to supply systems for 600 West Australian police vehicles - we wouldn't have been in the running for the contract without it."

New product innovation is vital to Hazard's business - as vehicle shapes become more aerodynamic, so too must its products.

"Our latest development is the low-profile lightbar that uses high efficiency LEDs as the flashing light source," Mr Heath said.

"LEDs produce coloured light much more efficiently than older style rotating lights and place much less load on the vehicle electrical system. Tasmania is a great place to experiment with these new ideas and the local emergency services are always more than happy to assist."

"Speed is still our major competitive advantage as we can offer better delivery to our overseas customers than their local suppliers and our inhouse technical staff respond quickly to requests for customisation. We've built ourselves a reputation for a 'can do' attitude and we're going to make sure we maintain it because it's the secret to our success."

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