

Success Story

QUEBEC'S WILDFIRE INC. AN OLD PRO IN CHILEAN MARKET

With a solid base in Canada that goes back almost one century, a small manufacturer of fire fighting equipment from Lachine, near Montreal, has been active in Chile for over 25 years.

Early foray into Chile

It was back in 1971 that Wajax Ltd. signed its first contract -- at that time worth US\$1.2 million -- in Chile for the supply of equipment to fight forest fires.

"Since then, our sales to Chile have averaged between \$250,000 to \$500,000 per year," says Wajax's Sales Supervisor José Bairos.

Wajax's customers include both government and private sector enterprises, but the largest is the government-owned Corporacion Nacional Forestal (CONAF).

How did this small 37 employee-strong manufacturer get attracted to Chile?

"We did some investigation in that country back in the late 60s and early 70s," says Bairos, "and learnt that there was no forest fire fighting equipment there."

Choosing the right agent

The next step followed soon after -- the appointment of a good agent.

"It is very important to find someone who will represent well the interests of your company," advises Bairos. "In our case, he is very active in constantly searching for new potential and finding information on new companies," he adds.

Wajax obviously picked the right agent -- still the original one appointed back in 1971 -- who has also started extending his prospecting into neighbouring Argentina.

Wajax likes the Chilean market not only because of

continued opportunities there, but also because of the business climate.

"It's a very stable country," says Bairos, "with a strong economy. Even the language barrier can easily be overcome with the appointment of a good agent."

Consolidation

In order to better package its lightweight fire pumps, Wajax added fire hoses manufactured by another small -- and over 100-year old -- Quebec company, Niedner Ltd., located in Coaticook, near Sherbrooke.

The two small manufacturers decided to join forces last year to form the group Wildfire Inc., complemented by a distribution division on the American West coast, in Seattle called Wajax Pacific. With a combined workforce of some 150 people and annual sales of \$30 million, Wildfire's sales are approximately 30 percent export-baed -- with major markets in Europe, South East Asia and South America.

Even after its 25-year presence in the Chilean market, Wajax -- it is still the exporting arm of the group -- finds it quite useful to maintain contacts with the Canadian Embassy.

"We always get good advice from Embassy staff on potential clients," says Bairos, "in the many countries we are active in around the world."



For more information on Wildfire Inc. or its group of companies, contact Wajax President Jim White. Tel.: (514) 637-5572. Fax: (514) 637-3985.