

Cincinnati Sub-Zero Takes Cold To New Heights

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Cincinnati Sub-Zero has a line of standard temperature-control chambers it sells to industrial customers, as the Business Courier reported in this week's newspaper, but most of its orders are custom made for specific applications.

Its largest ever chamber was sold to the U.S. Army to test mobile radar installations. It measured 55 feet by 25 feet by 20 feet - big enough to drive mobile radar units into.

"In the old days, you would wait until it got cold and send things to Alaska," said Bob Nelson, vice president and general manager of CSZ's industrial division.

Sales are picking up as companies are seeking to improve quality and troubleshoot potential problems by simulating hot-and-cold weather cycles. With a CSZ chamber that can cycle temperatures, along with other conditions such as high humidity and rain, years of contraction and expansion can be compressed into a short time span to test durability.

CEO Steve Berke cited the use of CSZ's test chambers by a manufacturer of radar detectors that was having problems with 20 percent failure rates. The problem was too much or too little solder, which caused the solder, wires and circuit boards to expand and contract at different rates, eventually loosening the connections. Once the problem was identified and fixed, the failure rates dropped to a fraction of 1 percent.

One of its more recent large customers is General Motors Corp, which uses CSZ chambers to test batteries for its Volt electric cars. CSZ is the sole supplier of test chambers to four Volt plants around the world, Berke said.

From the desk of the Jon Newberry