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# FORTIS ADHESIVES

DANDENONG SOUTH

## MIXING OF CHEMICALS TO CHANGE THEIR STRUCTURE

### Chemicals are what's cooking in the latest sticky mix

By Casey Neill

Need a glue or coating?

Check the giant cake mixer at Fortis Adhesives and Coatings.

The Dandenong South company mixes and cooks chemicals to change their structure.

A four-metre high mixer is among the tools of the trade, managing director Phillip Arena explained.

"It is a way of just cooking," he said.

"I love chemicals.

"You can just manipulate them.

"It's about bending molecules."

Fortis makes more than 120 products, from industrial adhesives and industrial coatings to protective coatings for floors and metals, and curing compounds for concrete.

"We do marine coating," Mr Arena said.

A large boat sits in the factory ready to coat, test, strip and coat again.

It's helped Fortis to develop four products in recent years - only one for nautical use.

Fortis is also an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) which means it makes products that carry another company's label, and Bunnings is among its clients.

Mr Arena has a PhD in organic chemistry and industry experience and training.

"I've been in the industry for over 20 years," he said.

"Eight years ago decided to do more work in Australia.

"The only way to truly do that was to set up my own business.

"No one was manufacturing these products in Australia.

"They went for large volume, large-use products.

"I decided to specialise in niche requirements - the large companies don't want to look at those niche requirements, it's too small a volume."

He set up in Seaford and operated for about six months before moving to Dandenong South.

"We've moved twice," he said.

"Then we've purchased this premise to scale up."

Fortis moved in on 1 December and aimed to be 90 per cent set up by the end of March.

On 6 December it received a Greater Dandenong Business Grant at Dandenong Civic Centre alongside four other businesses.

The grant included up to \$8000 plus business mentoring and marketing valued at about \$2000.

"We wanted new-style technology for our



Fortis Adhesives and Coatings managing director Phillip Arena says he loves his chemicals. 164195

phones," Mr Arena said when asked what the cash went towards.

The system sends a voicemail audio file from the landline phones to employees' mobiles and emails.

"We could be on the road or out the back manufacturing," Mr Arena said.

"That way you don't need to get to the phone all the time.

"We stay flexible.

"Everyone in our business is hands on.

"No one escapes anything."

The old building also needed a disabled bathroom and other upgrades.

"These are things we'd planned to do in the future but because we got the grant, we're doing them straight away," he said.

Fortis employs six people and uses some part-time and casual workers.

Mr Arena said the business was growing.

"We do a lot of research and development (RND)," he said.

"We also have an innovation grant with Monash University.

"A couple of guys work here and at Monash.

"We develop products that we bring into production and commercialise."

When a client approaches Fortis for a product, "we try to work out whether it's something that we already have".

"We work on the chemistry and the equipment they already have and what they're trying to produce," he said.

They link up with engineering firms that can build new machinery to handle the glues.

Fortis can also help people who are looking for a local or cheaper alternative to an existing product by analysing a sample in its laboratory.

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