

# MOBILE CLIMATE CONTROL

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“There is a fair amount of competition because there are many ways of temporarily heating something, but our equipment is by far the most energy-efficient and that is a key differentiator in the market, that our equipment is ‘green,’” explains DryAir CEO Daco Vroegindewey.

Founded in 1994 in St. Brieux, Saskatchewan, DryAir began as a research company for developing hydronic heating and cooling applications. Their initial product was aimed at the agriculture industry for grain drying. As with any emerging product, DryAir had its difficulties in cracking the market and developing a core customer base. It didn’t take long to realize that the direction that DryAir developers Claude and Pierre Bourgault had initially embarked on wasn’t the only market for their product.

Construction heating application was the new market where DryAir felt they could succeed. Equipped with a product that was very solid and ran like an engineer’s dream, the Bourgaults came up with a customized heating system that was something the industry had never seen before. The product was marketed to large rental companies and was greeted with initial success. In more recent years that success was overshadowed by management issues pertaining to “next-level growth” which led to some changes in the company.



Dennis Fagnou, DryAir Chief Operating Officer

## WHAT IS DRYAIR?

Think of a big building under construction without any heat yet. DryAir equipment is used to temporarily heat the site for concrete curing or heating so that it is above zero degrees. The key to the equipment is that it is mobile. DryAir's product is hydronic, which means a fluid (such as glycol) is the source of heat. The hot liquid is circulated throughout the building in a system of hoses then looped through a coil where air is blown through and dispersed. "Hydronic heat is much more efficient," says Vroegindewey. "This is opposed to having a heater and blowing hot air through the building which creates air pressure inside while somewhere else the air is leaking out so you're constantly bringing in cold air from outside the building that needs to be heated."

The major advantage of the DryAir technique is that instead of continually bringing in new air which is typically cold, and needs to be reheated, DryAir is re-circulating the same air with no loss of energy.

DryAir products are GreenSpec-listed in North America, which is an independent index of environmentally preferable products. Their newest green product is the DryAir "greenthaw" enclosed heating system that is used for ground thaw and concrete cure applications.

"Anytime we do ground thaw or concrete curing, we lay hoses down and circulate the hot fluid through them," says Vroegindewey. "When you circulate the hot fluid through the hoses there's going to be a point of entrance and a point of exit. If the flow is always going in the same direction, you can imagine that the first part will be thawing more rapidly than the last part because the temperature of the fluid is going to be greater at the entrance point than the exit." DryAir holds a patent on the flow reverse apparatus that controls the fluid flow. "It averages out the temperature and really makes concrete curing and ground thawing go so much faster while there's significant energy efficiency involved."

Daco Vroegindewey was brought into the mix by the board of DryAir in 2007. He had recently sold a successful insurance brokerage in Calgary where he was the owner and president. Daco was brought in as a temporary solution, but after a few months, the board of DryAir offered him

a full-time position as president and CEO of the company. During that period of time, the company re-structured and re-assessed their business plan to become "leaner and meaner" so that they would be able to pursue new opportunities and expand their horizons.

Rental stores have been the primary purchaser of DryAir equipment, and with each piece of equipment they purchase, they also receive training from certified DryAir staff. Handyman Rentals in Saskatoon is the major outlet in Saskatchewan and another location in Regina is in the works that will also carry DryAir equipment.

The United States was a natural progression early on for DryAir. They had similar needs as Canada and the same sort of rental outlets that cater to the construction business. But expansion into the UK was a completely different story.

"Our entry into the UK was somewhere around 2005 and was much different than the North American market," explains Vroegindewey. "There's no real need there for temporary heat because it rarely freezes over there. So our business there is entirely based on water restoration and insect killing and both of those were kind of new for us."

DryAir hopes to continue expanding the market in Europe, but for now they are content dealing with the United Kingdom and Ireland. The corporate office and manufacturing facility are located in St. Brioux, SK. There are two sales and service offices: one in Bowling Green, Ohio and one in Leeds, UK.

With DryAir now equipped with the tools and people necessary to continue marketing and expanding their product, another hurdle appeared. This hurdle was one that they were not alone in facing. The worldwide economic credit crisis hit the construction industry very hard, which means that DryAir's target market would have less revenue, less work and also less money to spend on new products. DryAir could do nothing but take



DryAir CEO Daco Vroegindewey

the crunch in stride. Although they were dealt another blow just as they finished revamping their own company, it also forced clarity and focus.

Now, 15 years after their beginnings, DryAir is still growing and learning, but have often been referred to as "the best-kept secret in the industry." Others have often tried to duplicate the performance of their patented system with limited success, and DryAir strives to stay ahead with advancements so that they can remain the product of choice.

A company built around a very good product with international demand, based in a small Saskatchewan town with the designers and manufacturers at the reins has the potential to be a challenging affair. By educating themselves, making changes when needed, and through trial and error they have managed to establish themselves as an industry powerhouse with strong morals and goals. Combine that with their drive and ambition to continually create a better product. And most importantly, a great group of people – the key to success anytime, anywhere. DryAir will be an industry leader and innovator for years to come. ■