

The Repel Story – a short history

Does anyone remember BP's advertising campaign *Beyond Petroleum* around 1997? This was an early effort by a major company to try to grow a green image. At that time I was employed by Adchem Industries Pty Ltd at Windsor, New South Wales. Amongst many other things, Adchem supplied BP with oil-based mould release agents which comprised about 20% of Australia's demand for concrete casting. BP's *Beyond Petroleum* campaign included a request for Adchem to develop water-based replacements for their oil-based release agents.

For 20 years Adchem had been a toll manufacturer supplying the petroleum industry with lubricants and cleaning agents. The company had recently given me the job of developing new chemical products which could be patented and manufactured by Adchem, giving it some much-needed independence. With BP's support – words, but no money – I gained for Adchem a federal government Start grant, and by June 2000 I had developed two water-based mould release agents for Adchem – one for spun pipes, the other to prevent adhesion of concrete overspray on plant and vehicles. I chose the collective name ***Repel*** for these products. Field trials indicated that these products were as good as any on the market, and trials and product adaptations for other purposes were begun.

A full Australian patent was applied for and granted. The environmental value of this new technology also gained for Adchem a semifinal place in the prestigious international St Andrews Prize. I also applied for an Australian Technology Showcase award, and won it for Adchem.

Many factors spoiled what should have been a success story, the worst of which was that Adchem was destroyed by fire in 2002. Eventually I gained control of the patent, transferring it to Berryessa Pty Ltd, this company owned by my wife and myself. Steady demand from loyal customers kept us going through thin times during which I designed a new type of ***Repel*** which I also patented. These new grades – ***Repel 52, 62*** and ***72*** – can never replace the original ***Repel 54*** and ***64***, but they open new markets – the whole range of general applications where concrete is cast.

We approach the future confident in the quality of our Repel range.

