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Rob Hildebrand shows a handful of rubber compound from used tires at Winkler Rubber.

Tire rubber reborn at Winkler facility

Once piled-up trash, now has many uses

By Bill Redekop

WINKLER — They're pulling cookie sheets out of ovens all day here but they don't contain cookies. They're your tires.

At least, what your old tires are being moulded into.

The list of products Winkler Rubber makes is eclectic and growing: mats for horse stalls, cattle trailers, truck boxes, hockey arena corridors (so skate blades don't dull) and golf course tee-off areas — everything except mats for your back door.

They make residential downspout splash pads (valley-shaped, to carry away water), and patio stones and sidewalk blocks. The sidewalk stones don't crack, like concrete does, and take centuries to break down. Some Canadian Tire stores started carrying the sidewalk blocks this year.

Next up may be 750,000 pounds of "crumbed" tires for the artificial turf at the new Blue Bomber stadium and two new University of Manitoba fields. The rubber crumb from recycled tires is used in most artificial turf today because it makes grass blades stand up and allows easy drainage.

Winkler Rubber is what remains of the former Tire Recycling Corporation, started by Dave Dyck in Winkler in 1992 and prompted by a government initiative to use rubber tires piling up in landfills. Tire Recycling went into receivership three years ago and Reliable Tire Recycling in Winnipeg, which also began in 1992, scooped it up. Reliable Tire moved the Winkler company's crumbing equipment to its Winnipeg location, and left the moulding operation in Winkler under new name, Winkler Rubber.

A major customer is Clearline Technologies in

Winnipeg, which uses the rubberized mounts to support solar panels on rooftops. You wouldn't think that's such a big business but Winkler Rubber sends Clearline 120 mounts per day. Reliable Tire owner Ashley Leibl said the company is now looking to make product not traditionally made from rubber. His gripe is what he says is the province's reluctance to give the products a chance. An 800-metre stretch of Portage Avenue in St. Charles has been resurfaced with rubberized asphalt but Leibl would like to do much more road-building.

As for the new stadium, Leibl is concerned crumb from another province may be used. That makes no sense when the government has encouraged and funded the development of recycled-tire products within Manitoba, he said.

The problem is whoever installs the artificial turf will want to work with a tire-crumb supplier it has worked with in the past, which could shut out Reliable Tire, said Leibl.

"We shouldn't be dragging what is essentially other peoples' garbage back here," said a Reliable Tire official.

Some other uses for moulded recycled tires include mats to hold down traffic cones, and a forgiving ground cover for outdoor play structures.

Manitobans go through about 1.4 million tires per year. Two companies are able to put most of them to use. Reliable Tire takes in all the passenger tires, and Off the Road Recycling in Ashern takes in most of the industrial tires from tractors and earth-moving equipment.

Winkler Rubber is down to five employees, compared to 27 before its receivership. Reliable Tire has 35 employees, up 10 since it absorbed the Winkler company.

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