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Enlarge By Robert Hanashiro, USA TODAY

A Line-X employee sprays bedliner on a truck bed. The material also has military applications.

By Chris Woodyard, USA TODAY

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The discovery of military applications is creating a nice sideline business for two pickup bedliner companies: Line-X of Santa Ana, Calif., a chain of 560 truck-bedliner franchisees around the country; and Rhino Linings of San Diego, which has about 900 dealers in the USA. Both are privately held.

**VIDEO**: Rhino lining being hit by a bullet. The plastic forms a membrane that can help seal leaks in the event of an attack, Rino says.

The companies have long known their spray-on polyurethanes have more uses than pickup beds. Line-X, for instance, says its

coatings cover the ground around oil storage tanks to contain spills. The polymer is used on Disneyland rides and submarine decks.

Now it's being used to coat buildings — most notably the Pentagon — as a protection from bombs. When sprayed on the masonry walls of buildings, it can reduce the disintegration of bricks or concrete into deadly flying fragments in a bombing or other attack.

At a Line-X store in Anaheim, not far from the company's headquarters, workers demonstrated the principle. A concrete block dropped 25 feet from the roof of the building shattered into fragments, some tiny ones landing more than 10 feet away. Another block covered with the thick coating bounced off the pavement with a thud. No breakage.

The sideline took off after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, including the one at the Pentagon that killed 125 who were inside the building when the plane hit, which underscored the need to protect people in buildings being attacked. "That really was our entry into this market," Line-X CEO Scott Jewett says.

Rhino President Pierre Gagnon says the military is now his company's single largest customer, even though 60% of the business is still pickup bedliners.

Both companies have had testing conducted in the New Mexico desert. Jewett says Line-X polymers passed tests in which 200 pounds of TNT was exploded 30 feet from building mock-ups. The blast broke through the building that wasn't treated with the bedliner. The treated room remained intact.

"It's good stuff," says retired Lt. Gen. Robert Flowers, former chief of the Army Corps of Engineers and now CEO of

HNTB Federal Services, which provides contract services to the government. He says the search for materials to protect against fragmentation started after the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, which killed 19 U.S. military personnel.

A consultant working with Line-X to protect the Pentagon, Tod Rittenhouse of the design firm Weidlinger Associates, says the discovery of the polyurethane's potential for blast protection was almost accidental. "We were testing some general materials for how to hold brick walls together and someone said, 'I just had this stuff sprayed on my truck. Let's give it a ride,' "Rittenhouse says. Sure enough, it worked.

About 20% of the Pentagon has been covered. The remainder could take up to five years, Jewett says.

When Line-X's coating was applied to a perimeter wall at the Washington, D.C., Navy Yard, it was even dressed up with fake mortar lines to give the appearance of the original brick.

The material also coats the plates inside 50,000 bulletproof vests being issued to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. The plates can protect wearers from a bullet fired from an AK-47 automatic weapon, Line-X says.

Rhino's polyurethanes are being sprayed on Humvees to reduce noise and help seal in the armor, which was added to protect against roadside bombs.

A version is also being used to coat fuel tanker trucks in Iraq. The plastic forms a membrane that can help seal leaks in the event of an attack, Gagnon says.

He says the company is proud to be protecting lives as well as pickup beds: "You really feel like you are part of something special when you are going to protect people."

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