

Coating inventor struggles to crack the construction market

By Terrance Noland

In the early 1980s, Keith Kent, a Tampa, FL, dentist and chemist, developed a nonstick coating that kept plaque off of teeth. He soon found that the patented silicone-based product, called Kiss-Cote, had scores of other uses. Boats moved faster, for instance, with Kiss-Cote applied to their hulls.

In 1986, he discovered by accident that the coating might have construction applications. His wife was making samples when she spilled some on the concrete laboratory floor. Trying to wash up the spill, Kent noticed that the affected concrete didn't get wet. And it didn't get dirty over time.

The discovery opened new possibilities for marketing the product as a waterproofing and protectant for building materials. Kiss-Cote offered features not found in other silicone-based products. It bonds to surfaces so it won't wash off, expands and contracts with the substrate so it won't crack off, and carries a nonstick outer face that protects from corrosion and keeps off unwanted substances like mildew, Kent says.

Yet 5 years later, despite the potential, Kent still hasn't made much headway in the construction industry. Lacking funding and industry knowledge, he has approached several building-product manufacturers for help in testing and marketing the coating. Though some have shown strong interest, none has been willing to make a commitment.

"What I've found is big companies don't deal with the little companies," says Kent. "It's the not-invented-here syndrome. They say, 'We're not going to work on external technology. We'll go and try to invent something similar ourselves.'"

Jim Fell, a construction consultant specializing in moisture problems, says Kent's plight is not unusual. "I've seen this happen with so many construction products. Many never get off the ground because of the money it takes. In this case, I think the product has a lot of merit."

Fell met Kent about 2 years ago when Kent was lobbying to have Kiss-Cote used on a building with moisture problems. Fell turned him down because the product lacked adequate testing. "But as I got to know Keith, I grew fascinated with

his product. It opened up potential never touched on before," says Fell.

Fell now consults for Kent and helps him identify uses for the coating, which can be applied as a Vaseline-like gel or a liquid. When called in to look at a building with a moisture problem, Fell often tests Kiss-Cote on portions to see if it will solve the problem.

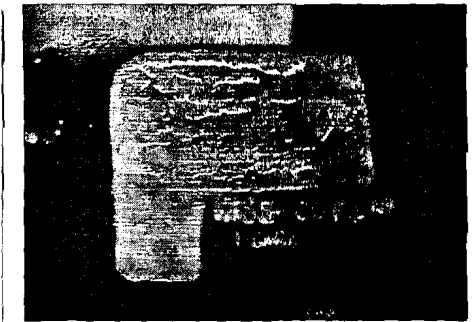
"I wouldn't say it could revolutionize things. But it would fill the gaps," Fell says. "The biggest destroyer of construction is moisture. If you can't control it, you'll have problems. The products on the market now just aren't that good."

Fell says Kiss-Cote's potential uses are unlimited and points out a few: restoring aluminum on windows and doors, stopping rust on rebar, keeping mildew off tile grout, waterproofing wood-fiber roofs, and protecting paint coatings. (One other: Fell uses it as shaving cream.)

But the product won't be widely used in the industry until outside testing is conducted and specifications are published. Those steps, Fell says, will cost about \$100,000. Hence Kent's search for a partner.

Meanwhile, Kent and his company, Kiss-Cote Inc., are trying to market the product to other industries as everything from a car wax to a coating for artificial human blood vessels.

"Applications are limited only by our imagination. That's been one of the difficult but fun parts," he says. □



Several years after Kiss-Cote was applied to this concrete, the affected area remains free of dirt.