



American made and small inflatable boats

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I must admit that I hadn't heard of the Berry Amendment until I talked to Bill Wing at Wing Inflatables in Arcata, Calif., while doing research for story about RIBs in *WorkBoat's* June issue.

Since Wing supplies inflatable tubes and hybrid foam-and-air sponsons to leading RIB builders like Willard Marine, SeaArk Marine and USMI, I figured Bill would have a handle on the shape of the market. What I didn't know is that Wing is trying very hard to grab a big chunk of the inflatable boat market for itself.

No, Wing isn't looking to compete with Willard et al. in the "rigid" inflatable boat market. Instead, the company is looking to compete with Zodiac in the not-so-rigid inflatable boat market. It seems that the U.S. military buys thousands of small inflatable boats they officially call "combat rubber raiding craft." For years, if not forever, Zodiac has been the supplier of these boats.

That is where the Berry Amendment comes in. The Zodiac boats are made of materials manufactured overseas, as are the boats themselves. Congress originally passed the Berry Amendment in 1941 to promote the purchase of certain U.S. goods. It requires the Department of Defense to buy American for certain, specific materials such as "fabric, fibers, yarns, and other made-up textiles" used for "individual equipment" and for "tents, tarpaulins or covers."

The Berry Amendment doesn't specifically mention "rubber boats," but since these boats are made from fabric (either Hypalon or polyurethane), Wing believes that it applies.

And now so does the DOD, or at least that's how it's looking at the moment. A recent procurement proposal for CRRCs specifies Berry Amendment-compliant materials and construction.

I sure hope the DOD follows through on this and awards the CRRC contract to a U.S. supplier. And since I know and respect Bill Wing, I hope his company wins the contract. He certainly has worked hard to get to this point, and his company's products have proven themselves over and over in other military applications.

Like just about every other area in the country, Humboldt County in Northern California badly needs jobs for its residents. Wing Inflatables would add up to 100 workers if it starts getting some DOD contracts for small inflatable boats.

That would be "Berry, Berry" good.



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