

New technology: *Using the Quill Falcon D-WAB system for wet blasting. A compressed air-propelled abrasive and water mixture prepares ship's surfaces*

Beng Kuang, Quill form $2m JV

By **VINCENT WEE**

CORROSION prevention services provider Beng Kuang Marine hopes to ride the wave of environmental awareness through a $2 million joint venture with Quill Far East.

The 50-50 JV, called Quill Marine, will manufacture, rent out, sell, repair and maintain Quill Falcon wet abrasive blasting machines.

Quill Marine will be the first company in Singapore to rent out and sell this type of equipment. It also plans to build a $10 million plant here to design and manufacture blasting equipment for the regional market.

Beng Kuang's management is coy on sales projections, but managing director Chua Meng Hua said the JV expects to break even in three years. Mr Chua said four sub-contractors are using wet blasting equipment already and he expects about 20 per cent of those using dry blasting equipment to switch to wet blasting in the next three years.

In the UK, the adoption of wet blasting has grown 5-10 per cent a year over the past four years, said Quill International group managing director David Dore. He expects the Singapore business to comprise 80 per cent rentals and 20 per cent sales.

Beng Kuang chairman Chua Beng Kuang said: "We hope to introduce wet abrasive blasting to Asia, as it can still be considered relatively new. We will be able to provide another alternative to meet different customer needs."

Wet blasting uses a compressed air-propelled abrasive and water mixture to prepare ship's surfaces for repair and maintenance. It is making inroads in the West, where environmental standards are higher.

Disadvantages of dry blasting include exposure to toxic dust, noise and other health and safety hazards. Wet blasting helps reduce environmental pollution as it uses about 50 per cent less abrasive grit, substantially lowering dust emission and the amount of containment required. Users can also expect quantifiable cost savings of about $4 per sq m of work area treated and about 20 per cent faster work time.

Demand for wet blasting is expected to be driven by client and regulatory requirements. For example, Sembawang Shipyard sub-contractor Seletar Engineering's Tea Kok Hong said cruise ship operators especially are demanding wet blasting.

The shipyard's location near housing area also makes the move to cleaner blasting methods more important.