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Firm to develop a bit of weight

Fire dummies put on pounds for company

By DAVID JONES
 Business Correspondent

IT may be a sign of how people's body sizes are increasing, but a Denbighshire manufacturer of fire and rescue dummies is now making a product at the top end of the weight range.

Corwen-based Ruth Lee Ltd has created an "obese" training dummy that weighs in at 28 stone and takes all of six people to lift.

The heavyweight dummy is said to be the only one of its kind on the market and is an example of how seriously the company takes product innovation.

In addition to manufacturing fire and rescue dummies, the firm also supplies a range of other products, such as resuscitation dummies.

Support from the Welsh Assembly Government's overseas trade and investment arm International Business Wales has helped Ruth Lee grow its overseas markets and it now exports to the USA, Canada, Australia, Europe and the Middle East. The company, which supplies fire brigades and others, has also been helped by the Manufacturing Advisory Service Wales.

Managing director Susan Edwards said: "As our business is growing we needed to look at our

unit and its capacity as we operate from a converted school rather than a purpose-built unit.

"MAS Wales helped streamline the operation, and reorganised the facility so that we were able to make best possible use of the plant - creating a more efficient system and increasing productivity.

"MAS also helped us meet customer demands by sourcing essential high-quality flame retardant material so that we could fulfil the need for a specific 'hot fire' training dummy.

"Now that the daily operations are more self-sustaining, there is more time available to develop new business opportunities, and product innovation."

Paul Byard, MAS Wales chief executive, said: "Innovation is essential if companies are to thrive in a highly competitive market, and we are pleased that the specialist advice from MAS Wales enabled the company to come up with the flame retardant dummy that is now selling internationally."

Ruth Lee employs 14 full time staff and as the business expands the company will be looking to recruit more employees.

It saw monthly turnover rise from £28,000 in January 2007 to £90,000 in January 2008 - an increase of 300%.

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