

Excerpts

## 3E Helps Clients Track, Handle Chemicals

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The people running the corner hardware store have a certain focus, Bob Christie says, such as marketing to the neighborhood.

Tracking every chemical a store stocks, and refreshing that data as government mandates change, isn't part of that focus.

For that job, hardware stores as well as many businesses turn to Christie's company, 3E of Carlsbad.

It's not just the guy selling spray paint and making keys that relies on 3E.

Businesses across the United States, indeed worldwide, lean on 3E for help with regulatory compliance and other services involving the handling of chemicals.

3E's bigger accounts are worth a half-million dollars, says one industry analyst, adding that the clients work in the life sciences, chemicals and industrial manufacturing sectors.

3E ranks 33rd on the Business Journal's 2009 list of the county's Largest Private Companies with revenue of \$46.6 million in 2008, up from an even \$45 million in 2007.

The workers at 3E never touch chemicals. Instead, they manage government-mandated paperwork known as material safety data sheets, or MSDS, and retrieve it at a moment's notice for the client.

They consult on the right way to transport chemicals and help with labeling requirements.

They can also answer the phone if there's a spill and dispatch a contractor to clean up the mess.

3E always answers its phones — even at 3 a.m. on Christmas Day — says Christie.

### Self-Funded

News accounts of 3E inevitably bring phone calls about how to invest, says Christie. It politely turns such requests away.



Robert Christie, seen in 3E's Carlsbad call center, has helped the business become the county's 33rd largest private company. | Photo by Stephen Whalen

“Everyone thinks we’re a startup,” Christie said. “We’re a profitable company with a very good cash flow.”

3E began life in 1988. For a while, Safety-Kleen, a Texas company that makes parts washers for auto repair shops, owned 3E. In 2002, a pair of venture capital firms, locally based Mission Ventures and Chicago-based Frontenac, put up a management-led buyout.

The company’s owners brought in Christie in 2004, giving him the mandate to grow the business. Christie, 55, is a New Jersey native who commutes there on weekends.

Today, 3E is working to grow organically and through acquisition, Christie says.

It acquired Ariel Research in 2004 and HSE Systems in 2007. Christie says the company “walked away” from an acquisition a few weeks ago. He did not name the business.

Today, he employs 136 at his Carlsbad office and counts 308 employees overall.

Analyst Simon Jacobson, who covers 3E for Boston-based AMR Research, lists 3E’s competitors as Atrion International of Montreal and The Weracs of New York. There are several other competitors in the information technology space.