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Group hails 'Innovators of the Year'

Drinkable insecticide
one of four '94 winners

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Staff Reporter

An insecticide so safe that humans can drink it?
Sounds like an award winner.
And it is.

The insecticide, BK 2 Z, has won an Innovator of the Year award for Safe-Tee Chemical Products, the Phoenix-based company that developed it.

Safe-Tee is one of four winners in the 1994 competition. The innovation honors are bestowed each year by the Arizona Innovation Network, a group that works in support of the development of technologically innovative companies in the state.

The winners were to be honored at a banquet Dec. 8 at The Buttes resort in Tempe. The other winners are Brian A. Larkins, Jeffrey E. Habben and Gloverson L. Moro of the University of Arizona Department of Plant Sciences; Peter R. Vokac of DTI in Tucson; and Safko International in Tempe.

BK 2 Z is a water-based insecticide that Safe-Tee says is the first sprayable insecticide that contains no toxins. Safe-Tee expects to start selling BK 2 Z in January.

"What we're waiting for is the international patents to be filed. Then we'll start producing it," said Dennis J. McCormac, president of Safe-Tee. "If we sell any of it prior to those being filed, then we lose our international rights to it."

Mr. McCormac explains the in-

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MORE INNOVATORS OF THE YEAR

Computer/
software category:
Safko International

Medical/
biotechnology
category:

Peter R. Vokac,
DTI Inc.

Medical/
biotechnology
products category:

Brian A. Larkins,
Jeffrey E. Habben
and Gloverson L.
Moro, all of the
University of
Arizona

Department of
Plant Sciences

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'Innovators'

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secticide "short-circuits the nervous system." It is harmless when ingested by animals with vertebra but "extremely toxic to insects" and other invertebrates, he said.

Mr. McCormac plans to produce and sell BK 2 Z at Safe-Tee and to license other companies to do the same. He expects BK 2 Z to be priced comparably to widely used petroleum-based insecticides.

Mr. McCormac said he was a sales representative for 15 years with DuPont in Ohio before moving to Arizona in 1980 and founding Galaxy Chemicals, a supplier to the printing industry. He bought Safe-Tee about five years ago from George Aboud, now a senior chemist and technical adviser at Safe-Tee.

This is the fifth year the awards have been made.

The volunteer judges for this year's awards were Bob Calcaterra of the Arizona Technology Incubator, Steve Wallis of First Interstate Equity Corp., Ted Myers of Hamilton Strategic Management Group, Kent Mueller of Mastersoft and Bill Verdini of Arizona State University.

The awards and dinner are part of "Innovation Day" designated by Gov. Fife Symington. The awards dinner theme this year is "Innovators: Agents of Change."

James C. Withers of MER Corp. in Tucson is the network's chairman. Mathew A. Diethelm of Intel in Chandler is president.

System puts disabled back in control of lives

Talk about computer software making life better.

Check out Safko International's Sensei (pronounced *sen-say*) System, the winner in the computer/software category in the Innovator of the Year awards competition.

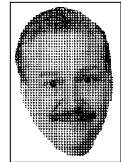
The awards are presented by the Arizona Innovation Network, which seeks to support technically innovative businesses in Arizona.

Lon Safko is president and chief executive officer of Tempe-based Safko. Its Sensei System combines thousands of computer programs written for Apple computers for use by significantly disabled people.

The system allows a disabled person to control everything from entertainment systems to electric hospital beds by using a variety of control devices operated by hand, head, mouth or foot, depending on the nature of the disability.

Mr. Safko, a civil engineer who migrated to computers, designed the forerunner to the system — "the world's first voice-activated computer for disabled," he says — in 1985 for a Washington state man who became a quadriplegic after breaking his neck in an accident suffered while, of all things, helping a quadriplegic in a wheelchair down some steps.

The man, a mechanical engineer, lost his job due to his disability and spent his life savings on medical bills, Mr. Safko said. His house was repossessed and his wife left him. The devastation of his life left him suicidal, Mr. Safko recalls.



LON SAFKO

"In 1985 there was nothing available for this guy, so I said, 'Keep the faith, I'll build you something,'" Mr. Safko said. "So I programmed a computer to recognize his voice and to turn on the lights and change TV channels and activate his phone. And it actually saved his life. Nine months later, he moved to Seattle, had a condominium and he was doing engineering consulting."

Mr. Safko and his wife "fell in love" with Arizona after a visit and moved here in 1989. His company has been providing beta systems to hospitals and as of June, ended its research and development phase and began emphasizing sales and marketing.

He has assembled a management team and expects to sell at least several hundred Sensei Systems in 1995. The most expensive version of the system costs about \$15,000, he said.

With the system, even an individual completely paralyzed from the neck down can be functional at home, on the job or in a classroom, Mr. Safko said.

— Paul Schneider

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