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Invention seeks to stop snow flying from atop truck trailers

Brian Lockhart, Staff Writer
Updated 11:25 p.m., Thursday, January 26, 2012

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After searching nationwide for a method to keep hazardous snow and ice from flying from the tops of truckers' rigs, [Connecticut Motor Transport Association](#) head [Michael Riley](#) thinks he's found the solution ... in Beacon Falls.

That's where [Wilmar Valverde](#), a self-styled inventor from Seymour, and his partners have built and tested a model for a patented snow removal system they hope will become standard equipment in the trucking industry.

And Riley in particular said he hopes this "Snow B Gone" system -- a blade fastened between two tracks atop a trailer with temperature sensors to detect frozen condensation -- will be ready by Dec. 31, 2013. That's when, under state law, Connecticut police can begin ticketing motorists who fail to remove snow and ice from their vehicles.

For years, Riley successfully fought passage of such a law because there have been no easy and safe solutions to clean the high tops of truck rigs. State lawmakers acknowledged the challenge when they passed the fines in 2010 and gave the industry nearly four years to figure out a solution.

"I went from booth to booth to booth at the [American Trucking Association's](#) exhibition in Texas in October and asked trailer manufacturers, truck manufacturers, people that had gizmos and doodads and thingamajigs if they were working on this and didn't find anybody," Riley said.

Valverde contacted Riley last summer, but he said he actually began thinking about Snow B Gone several years ago after witnessing an accident while driving on Interstate 91.

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"A sheet of ice fell out of the truck, hit the windshield of this old lady," Valverde said. "She panicked, lost control, spun ... she ended up hitting a guardrail."

The woman was uninjured, but the incident inspired the inventor to get to work.

In January 2008, Valverde filed his designs with the U.S. Patent Office. They were approved last April.

On Thursday, [Mark Nowotarski](#), a patent agent in Stamford, reviewed Valverde's patent online for [Hearst Connecticut Media Group](#) to confirm

its legitimacy.

"This was allowed without any rejections at all, which is pretty unusual for a patent," Nowotarski said. "So good for him, and good for his patent attorney. They all did a good job."

Now, Nowotarski said, Valverde has the rights to his invention for 20 years before it can be made and sold by anyone else.

Valverde formed a corporation with fellow investors [Richard DeCapua](#), of Shelton, truck driver and construction worker [Michael DeFelice](#), of New Haven, and [Bart Hogestyn](#), CEO of [Ansonia Steel Fabrication Co. Inc.](#)

Hogestyn's business on Pines Bridge Road in Beacon Falls is home to a Snow B Gone model mounted on a rectangular metal box.

"This is the initial device just to get there and prove the theory," Hogestyn said Wednesday when Hearst visited.

The next step is to install a sensor -- technology Hogestyn said is used in snow-melting devices installed in driveways -- that will automatically trigger the Snow B Gone blade. He will then begin testing the model.

"It's the right idea," said Riley, who also stopped by Ansonia Steel on Wednesday. "The answer is vehicle-based, not land-based, so this goes with the truck." He also expected the equipment is simple enough to be affordable.

Riley is urging a full-scale model be ready to display to lawmakers in Hartford this winter.

"I'm dying to see it," House Minority Leader [Lawrence Cafero](#), R-Norwalk, who spearheaded the snow-removal legislation, said Thursday. "In order to get the bill through -- there was so much opposition -- I had to compromise on the 2013 date. I figured better late than never, and I'm just glad people are starting to do more than think about it."

DeCapua said by this time next year he is hoping to have deals with manufacturers and Snow B Gone on the market.

Riley is thinking big.

"We could be the Snow -- whatever it is -- capital of the world," he said.

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