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Army goes 'green' with Neil Kelly cabinets

Kendra Hogue December 02 2014



Photo Credit: TRIBUNE PHOTO: JONATHAN HOUSE - Tom Kelly, president and CEO of Neil Kelly has been contracted by the U.S. Military to produce green cabinets.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003500535077.jpg>) The U.S. Army recently drafted Tom Kelly, president and CEO of Portland-based Neil Kelly Cabinets, and he's happy to serve.

Officer residences are being remodeled at the legendary Schofield Barracks on Oahu. The Army needs 2,000 kitchen and bathroom cabinets for 188 residences — a big order, to be sure, with a surprising twist.

Wood used in the cabinet construction had to be 100 percent certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

A competing cabinet company that had worked for the military before bowed out because of FSC's strict rulebook. Then a broker found out about Neil Kelly Cabinets.

"In 1998, we were the first cabinet-maker in the U.S. to be FSC-certified," said Kelly.

"FSC is a 'from the forest to the product' process," Kelly explained. "The forest itself, the company that mills the wood, the distributor, the manufacturer — all those players need to be certified. The FSC certification "isn't greenwashed," added Kelly, a longtime proponent of sustainable building.

"The FSC does audits on the whole supply chain," Kelly added. "It's a real deal, they do check on things. That's one of the things I like about FSC — it has a strong reputation."

Sustainable wood is just a few percent more costly than regular wood, but working for the military isn't a "price is no object" proposition.

"Our pricing had to be competitive," said Kelly. "It's a sharp-penciled operation." They look for price, high-quality goods that last, with green content."

Neil Kelly Cabinets got the \$550,000 military contract and will start the work in a few months, sending batches of cabinets to Hawaii over a four- to five-month period.

"This order is really big for our company," said Kelly. "This will be a big part of our volume for this next year.

"This is the largest order we've received since 2008, when we were working on a 243-unit condo before the recession hit."

Though Kelly says he's got the machinery and staffing to do the job, he plans to hire four to five employees to keep the work moving along at a good clip.

The cabinets will be made of plastic-laminated FSC-certified plywood, which sounds strange, but Kelly explains.

"Historically, plywood is made with binders made of formaldehyde. What we use is No Added Urea Formaldehyde, or NAUF." Wood produces a small amount of formaldehyde naturally, but NAUF means there's nothing added. It's technical, but we need to say that."

Kelly said his company is proposing to fill another order.

Is there any significance to the barracks order, beyond giving Kelly's company a sizable chunk of business?

"Anytime a major part of our economy like the Army sets standards on sustainable or green, that has pretty big influence," said Kelly. "It has a ripple impact down through the supply chain. FSC wanted to influence the market, and it has."

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