

Boeing Expands Gresham Manufacturing Plant

The Oregonian

GRESHAM, Ore. (AP) — A lone contractor plugged away at a laptop Thursday in a gleaming chemical processing plant about to open at Boeing's factory complex in Gresham.

The worker tested and adjusted computerized controls for the plant, which has a series of chemical baths — filled, for now, with water — that will treat aircraft parts in preparation for assembly at Puget Sound factories.

Boeing invested more than \$100 million in the 64,000-square-foot plant and additional expanded quarters, which opened Friday with tours and speeches by company managers. Already the aircraft manufacturer has added 350 workers since breaking ground two years ago on the new space.

"This provides us a modern chemical processing facility that's going to support our site for large products for a very long time in the future," said Don Hendrickson, Boeing Portland chief financial officer. "You don't make this investment if you're going to keep work here for a couple of years."

The new jobs bring Boeing's Gresham employment to 1,800, a significant workforce in a state that lost manufacturing operations during the recession. Workers make parts from aluminum, steel, titanium, magnesium and other specialized metals for Boeing "7-series" planes such as the 787 Dreamliner.

The processing plant is the first of its kind to gain LEED gold environmental certification, said Don Schmidt, a company spokesman. It dispenses with cyanide-based copper plating and stripping and cadmium-based processing, substituting more environmentally friendly chemicals, Hendrickson said.

Skylights bathe the new manufacturing lines in natural light. Water will be reused instead of discharged. Runoff will enter bioswales designed to filter water.

The accompanying 34,000-square-foot expansion of existing quarters will bring Boeing's Gresham complex to a total 1.3 million square feet.

Twenty-year projections predict a worldwide demand for 35,000 new large commercial planes, for a total \$4.5 trillion market, Hendrickson said. Boeing traditionally gets about half the market, and plans to deliver 585 planes this year, he said.

The company is building 35 Boeing 737s a month in Renton, Wash. It plans to increase that number to 38 and then 42. Boeing 777 production will jump from seven a month to more than eight.

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Workers in the new Gresham plant will use their new computerized controls to clean, plate and etch parts for these and other planes. "It's going to be a busy place," Hendrickson said.

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