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From left: Dalglish, Kevin Knight of Retro-Specs Ltd. (with Manitoba-designed Airtsure leak detector) and Frank Ernst of Durwest Construction (with air-barrier material).

U.S. deals in the air for city energy firm

Massachusetts contract in the works

By Geoff Kirbyson

A Winnipeg-based firm is poised to make a multimillion-dollar break into the U.S. construction market with a program to make new buildings more energy-efficient and cost-effective.

Building Professionals Consortium, a three-year-old firm spun off from the National Energy Conservation Association, expects to have a deal in place this week to oversee the development of controlled air flow environments in newly constructed buildings in Massachusetts.

Ryan Dalglish, BPC's business manager, said the firm will provide quality assurance management programs from the manufacturer through to the installer to ensure air barriers — which range from spray-on, peel-and-stick or torched-on membranes to a building's walls — are installed correctly.

Failure to have a proper air barrier can result in increased moisture in a building, which can lead to a variety of problems, including poor air quality caused by mould and mildew to bricks popping off the exterior from structural damage, Dalglish said.

He said BPC's program, which has

already been used in Canada, has excellent potential in the U.S. because of rising concerns over the amount of energy wasted to run buildings.

He noted the proper construction of an air barrier is crucial because once a building is complete, it's difficult to go back in and change it.

"It will cost 50 times more to fix than to do it right the first time," he said.

Dalglish declined to give any specifics of the deal, but said if the business potential is reached in the next decade, BPC would have to expand 10 to 20 times its current size of 10 employees and \$1 million in annual revenue.

Code revision

Earlier this month, BPC was approved to manage the newly formed Air Barrier Association of America and provide its ISO 9002 certified quality assurance management.

David Weitz, energy code co-ordinator for the Boston-based Massachusetts Board of Building Regulations and Standards, said the air-barrier business is being driven by a revision to the state's building code, which includes a requirement for continuous air barriers in new commercial buildings.

"This is a big deal. More attention

will have to be paid to the design and execution of the skin of every new building," he said, adding air leakage has a significant effect on heating and cooling costs.

Weitz said the new building code is not retroactive for existing buildings, but will apply to a "good bit" of new building construction expected in the state this year.

While air-barrier technology may be new to many in construction circles, Weitz pointed to the recent Build Boston conference, which was attended by thousands of architects and designers and featured five workshops on air barriers and the new code.

"We've had an interesting upsurge in commercial activity, product manufacturing and new Web sites that give technical advice on this kind of thing," he said.

BPC also plans to introduce its program to other states and throughout Canada within the next few years and it will partner with unions and colleges in the U.S. to provide training services locally. Dalglish said all administration will be handled from Winnipeg with an emphasis on creating more jobs in the city.

BPC's local partners include Retro-Specs Ltd., Alpha Masonry and Durwest Construction Inc.