

# Business

## Meg-Alert units protect motors at New York memorial

Company is based in Minocqua

By Julie Wroblewski  
of The Lakeland Times

Rick and Laurie Zelm's small-town company, Meg-Alert Inc., is making a big-time appearance. Meg-Alert units, which protect and monitor electric motors or generators, have been installed at the world's largest waterfall fountain system at the World Trade Center memorial in New York.

"We got a call from Delta Fountains, out of Jacksonville, Fla., who told us the Meg-Alert Motorguard units they'd just ordered from us were being used at the 9/11 memorial. I was pretty proud that our products were going to contribute to a part of American history," Rick Zelm said. "It's not every day that a small company like ours has an opportunity to do that."

Delta ordered 32 Meg-Alert Motorguard units to be utilized at the National Sept. 11th Memorial located at the World Trade Center. They will be protecting the 16 water pump motors used on both the north and south fountains.

Meg-Alert is a permanently installed automatic, in-line insulation resistance tester and monitor.

In other words, it continuously tests motors and alerts the user if there is a problem with the winding insulation inside the motors in order to prevent failures ahead of time.

The fountain project at the World Trade Center was a mammoth undertaking. Set in the exact footprints of the north and south towers, each fountain holds 600,000 gallons of water and 56,000 gallons of water per minute flow over two 720-foot low-head dams into two 28-foot deep, acre-size pools. The water in the fountains is filtered at a rate of 6,000 gallons per minute to ensure the quality of the water and filter out any coins or debris.

The memorial was dedicated Sept. 11, 10 years after the



Meg-Alert Inc., of Minocqua, produces units that protect motors and generators from failure. Thirty-two of those units protect the water fountain system at the World Trade Center memorial. Pictured are the company's owners (from the left) Laurie and Rick Zelm, with their dog, Billy.

Julie Wroblewski photograph

World Trade Center attack.

"Protecting motors from failure is just one important feature at the fountains. The Meg-Alert Motorguards provide added human safety by warning of any electrical grounds, which can cause someone to get hurt," Zelm said.

The Meg-Alert units at the memorial site are monitored remotely, via a computer application. The Meg-Alert units help the Delta engineers operate and monitor the fountains from more than 1,000 miles away at their offices in Jacksonville.

### How it came to be

Originally from Illinois, Zelm graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a degree in industrial technology and embarked on career as a electric motor service technician in Minnesota. In the late 1970s, he and Laurie moved to New Orleans, La., where he started his own business, PEMCO, repairing and servicing motors and generators mostly for oil field companies in the Gulf of Mexico.

"After awhile, I thought, 'There's got to be a better way to protect these motors and generators,'" Zelm said.

It was then he developed the Meg-Alert, the first and only motor and generator protection device of its kind.

"I filed for the patent to manufacture in 1984, and it took six years to get it," Zelm said. "The patent office just couldn't believe it hadn't been done before."

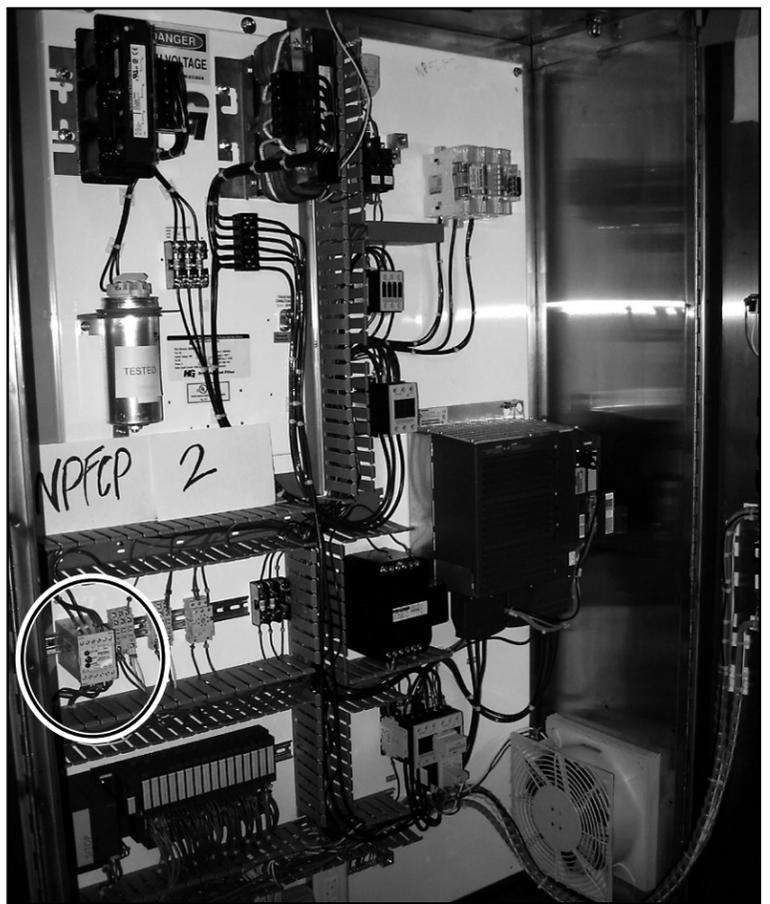
Because of the growing crime level in New Orleans, the Zelms pulled anchors and moved to the Northwoods, where they'd been vacationing for years. They sold the motor repair shop, but retained Meg-Alert.

"We are still the only company in the entire world manufacturing a product like this," Zelm said.

And it's done right here in a little building in Minocqua. The company sells around \$1 million a year of their products and it's Laurie, Rick and only a few others making the product.

Laurie, an expert circuit board builder, pumps out around six a day alongside Diane Reinicke. Rick tests the units once they're completely built and makes the final adjustments and settings.

The units are shipped to companies all over the U.S. and the world. The Coast Guard and Navy each have Meg-Alerts protecting their motors, as do airports, universities, hospitals, various steel and paper mills, oil refineries and rigs, food and dairy plants, as well as other industrial manufacturers.



Contributed photograph

The Meg-Alert Motorguard is shown (circled) at the control panel of one of the motors at the memorial.

The Meg-Alert unit can work for everyone, not just big companies. Customers may, in fact, walk right into the Meg-Alert building and purchase a unit to monitor a generator at their house, for example.

"Meg-Alert can go on any motor or generator of any size anywhere. It's been adapted to different sizes and can accommodate all spectrums of motors or generators, from 120 to 13,800 volts," Zelm said.

The price ranges from \$250 to \$3,000 depending on the test voltage and other features.

### Other endeavors

The Zelms had been coming to the Lakeland area to vacation for years when they learned the White Sand Lake Resort in Lac du Flambeau was for sale. They bought it in 1986 and recruited Zelm's parents, Dick and Arlene Zelm of Huntley, Ill., to manage the resort (they still do).

Rick and Laurie built a cabin near the resort – it was pretty rustic the first few years, Rick admits – but renovated it over time into the home they've

lived in since 1993.

Since 2000, Rick's been coaching the club U-14 girls' hockey team.

Four years ago, he approached the Lakeland Union High School Board of Education about implementing a school-sponsored girls' varsity hockey team.

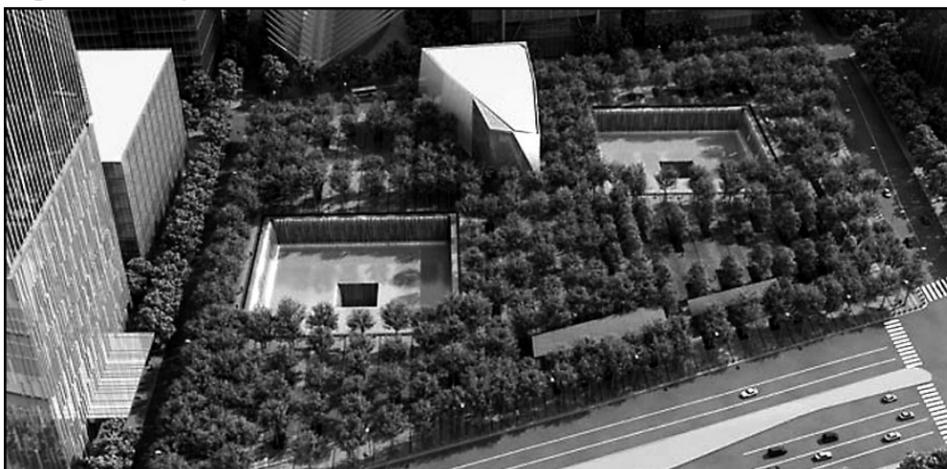
"They agreed, and asked me to be the head coach," Zelm said. "I really have enjoyed it and the team has come a long way in a short period of time."

### An honor

Zelm was pleased to have his product represented at a site as poignant as the World Trade Center.

"If you think about how small this town is, and here we are, manufacturing a unit that's protecting motors all over the world – and at the 9/11 memorial – well, that to me is a really great thing," Zelm said.

Meg-Alert is at 8766 Frank Drive, Minocqua. The phone number is 715-356-1499 or visit the website [www.mega-alert.com](http://www.mega-alert.com).



Contributed photograph

The National Sept. 11th Memorial, shown here, was dedicated this year.



Rick Zelm (from the left) gives a tour of the Meg-Alert facility in Minocqua while Laurie Zelm and Diane Reinicke make Meg-Alert Motorguard circuit boards.

Julie Wroblewski photograph