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AUTOMOTIVE

TribotEX Is Awarded An AFWERX SBIR To Explore Nanomaterial Coating Platforms Intended To Improve Operational Lifetimes Of Helicopter Gearboxes.

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The Air Force has noticed an innovative start-up revolutionizing the existing status quo in lubrication industry. TribotEX produces wear reversing, nanomaterial based, smart coatings engineered to build a protective coating during normal operation. In 2013, TribotEX was awarded a Phase I Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant from National Science Foundation with a plan to explore the feasibility of developing protective coatings using a nanomaterial platform. Phase II Award solidified success with scaling up of the unique manufacturing process. TribotEX has come a long way since then; with the launch of its coating technologies for the consumer vehicle market via [Kickstarter in February of 2017](#), TribotEX has been deployed in over thirty thousand vehicles world-wide and rapidly growing! The benefits of their radical approach have not only been spotted by consumers of all ages, spreading across various demographics regardless of the user's knowledge or expertise with cars; but this easy-to-use product that delivers drop-in coating nanomaterials,

has started being recognized outside of the automotive industry. Winning the highly coveted and competitive Air Force round 18.3 SBIR grant provides exciting new opportunities for TriboTEX to existing operational capabilities by protecting helicopter gearboxes. The team has been researching and exploring new ways to address various technical, environmental and military based challenges.

Pavlo Rudenko, PhD, the company's founder was grateful for the new opportunity to expand the technology further. "The new AFWERX SBIR is an amazing concept," he said, "the Air Force has identified the potential benefits of advanced technology small business startups have to offer. We are excited to collaborate with stake holders across the Air Force by providing lubrication solutions to persistent pain points, particularly promising are applications inside of helicopter gearbox." Pavlo discussed the challenges for any small business new comer in the established lubricant industry, dominated by century old, large companies. "TriboTEX has been generating a steady base of adopters for nearly two years in the consumer market, yet we have only recently began attracting a growing attention of industrial users, who tend to take a more conservative approach with regards to their lubrication strategies. The TriboTEX team made substantial investments into awareness generation and general education of the novel technology. Slowly the fruits of that labor have been coming to fruition." The industry is developing interest, TriboTEX nanomaterial coatings were recognized in 2017 with a prestigious Defense Innovation Award. AFWERX will usher in the next phase of growth providing TriboTEX coatings a proving ground in new level of technical complexity." Pavlo is optimistic about the future, "This award opens an important door for us. We are excited to explore the capabilities of the nanomaterial coating platform with the purpose of alleviating application specific problems of stake holders within the Air Force."

Small business innovations continue to drive the US economy and have caught the attention of the United States military. Recognizing that technological developments from US based small businesses can be leveraged to further and expand operational superiority the Air Force launched a novel platform to seek out innovative solutions. AFWERX, according to the Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, is based on a model used by the Special Operations Command. The program is focused on stripping bureaucracy out of the process by opening the doors to innovative problem solvers. This new approach will aid in bringing forward cutting-edge technological solutions by leveraging small amounts of money. The Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) and AFWERX have partnered to streamline the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) process in an attempt to speed up the experience, broaden the pool of potential applicants and decrease bureaucratic overhead. Beginning in SBIR 18.2, and now in 18.3, the Air Force has begun offering 'Special' SBIR topics that are faster, leaner and open to a broader range of innovations.

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