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Safe-syringe firm takeover

By Peter Clack

Uni-ject, a Canberra-based firm that manufactures the entire Australian supply of retractable safety syringes — about five million a year — has been taken over in a \$4 million deal by a United States-Australian consortium, Ensi-Med International.

The new owner intends to boost Australian production to 60 million in 2004 as it builds a new factory in New York capable of producing up to 500 million a year.

Ensi-Med bought the intellectual property and assets of Uni-ject, which has its production plant in the Melbourne suburb of Seaford, after it was placed in voluntary administration in 2002. It has a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant, and exports to 10 countries, including the US, Holland, Japan and China.

The syringe was developed as the world's first retractable syringe in 1994 and has been approved by the US Federal Drug Agency and US Department of Defence. The Ensi-Med consortium was formed to rescue and build this business.

Ensi-Med's chief executive, Benjamin McGainey III, said retractable disposable syringes prevented the major problem of needlestick injuries and reduced the need for dangerous and expensive sharps containers.

"The safety syringe is a great Australian invention and we were determined to save it," he said yesterday at the head office in Fyshwick.

About 40 billion syringes were used in the world each year, and the retractable ones saved lives and made much better commercial sense for health authorities.

Ensi-Med was planning to expand into other continents and to achieve much higher sales in existing markets.