



MARITIME TECH

## Forever No More. How Tacoma Maritime Startup Aquagga is Destroying Water Contaminants Once Thought Indestructible

*The Port of Tacoma Becomes Home to the Future of Maritime Industry Innovation*

Leading water treatment startup [Aquagga](#) is in the front row at The Port of Tacoma, looking at a global opportunity to do good. “Being in a port as part of the [Tacoma Maritime Innovation Incubator](#) is ideal. We’re in an industrial location, and we’re dealing with an industrial problem,” said Brian Pinkard, Co-Founder and CTO at Aquagga.

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Pinkard learned to destroy chemical weapons while earning his PhD in mechanical engineering from the University of Washington. It’s a unique skillset helping to scale the emerging startup’s technology which destroys a class of chemical pollutants in our

water, known as “forever chemicals.” Aquagga’s technology, they say, is the only system which completely destroys per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) with no toxic byproducts.

The chemicals, which were first produced nearly a century ago and resist heat, oil, stains and water, are now found in thousands of products from non-stick pans and raincoats to firefighting foam. But these human-made chemicals don’t stay there. They leach into drinking water and the environment and can be found in tissues of plants, people, and even animals as remote as polar bears in the Arctic. Studies show PFAS causes reproductive, developmental and immunological effects and can damage the liver and kidneys.



Aquagga’s mission goes beyond remediation to put an end to these forever chemicals. “We’ve brought together scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and inventors on an impact mission to destroy water contaminants,” Nigel Sharp, Co-Founder and CEO at Aquagga, said. “We feel a responsibility for the world. There was a seal on the deck outside our office at the Port the other day; you see animals coexisting in the environment and you care about that.”

Aquagga is quickly finding others care about its mission, as funding for its technology accelerates with high-value grants from the Environmental Protection Agency, National Science Foundation and money from investors. The startup has also won multiple environmental awards, including the 2020 Alaska Airlines Environmental Innovation Challenge, for its proprietary bolt-on water treatment platform that destroys PFAS contaminants.

Founded in Juneau, Alaska in 2019, the startup's leadership team quickly found its home in Tacoma, which happened to be in Pinkard's backyard. Pinkard is a native South Sounder and graduate of Puyallup High School. Behind his personal connection to the area, growing his tech company in Tacoma also makes good business sense. "We're being welcomed to the tech and maritime ecosystem here to solve a problem that has global impact," said Pinkard. "We want to put Tacoma on the map as a place where tough tech and deep tech can thrive, and Tacoma has the grittiness to get this done."

Aquagga is a member of the first cohort at the Tacoma Maritime Innovation Incubator, part of Washington State's Maritime Blue initiative to develop maritime business, technology, and practices that promote a sustainable future accelerating economic growth, ecological health, and thriving communities. Nate Tolbert, director of the Tacoma incubator, said, "Tacoma and the Pierce County innovation ecosystem is a welcoming environment full of start-up founders banding together and putting in the hard work to build our economy and create an incredible place to both live and work."

Aquagga's growing team leverages resources from Maritime Blue and the Tacoma and Pierce County tech community to innovate on its mission, according to Sharp, "The resources Maritime Blue brought us include perfect office and lab facilities along with essential tools and equipment for our projects. We're also tapping into mentors from the University of Washington Tacoma. Everyone is very engaged."

While this is just the beginning for Aquagga, Sharp and the team believe they're in the right place to put an end to PFAS. "You look out the window and see industry happening and you can see we as people have a direct impact on the environment, and only we can choose what that impact looks like."

Follow Aquagga's story on its [LinkedIn page](#). Track the successes and plug into the startup ecosystem in Tacoma and Pierce County on [LinkedIn](#) by following Startup253 and heading to [www.edbTacomaPierce.org/technology](http://www.edbTacomaPierce.org/technology).

**About the Tacoma-Pierce County Economic Development Board:** Since 1978, the private, 501(c)(6) nonprofit [EDB](#) has been laser-focused on recruiting new firms to Pierce County, retaining those that are here, and helping all of them expand. The EDB supports companies to create new jobs and to grow the economy of the South Sound and Washington State, USA. In the past two decades, the EDB has worked with companies that have made over \$1.6 billion in capital investments and created over 25,000 jobs.

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FOOTER:

The mission of the Tacoma-Pierce County Tech Cluster Acceleration Initiative is to foster a lattice of innovation that makes the South Sound a hub for technology business talent. The Economic Development Board for Tacoma-Pierce County, in collaboration with Startup253 and s2s Public Relations and Communications is proud to share stories like this that showcase Pierce County technology companies who exemplify "Where Tech Lives."