

Sustainability. During a panel discussion at this year's Fakuma trade show in Friedrichshafen, Germany, VDMA, the German Engineering Federation, seized the opportunity to present its Blue Competence Initiative to the international press. The initiative's main target is to underline the fact that sustainability is an issue not only of environmental industry. There are huge potentials for this challenging task in machinery and plant engineering too.

Engineering Industry Launches Blue Competence Initiative



Different approaches to sustainability were presented by the representatives of enterprises that took part in a panel discussion at the Friedrichshafen trade show premise. Panelists from left to right: Thorsten Kühmann (host), managing director of VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery; Ulrich Reifenhäuser, managing director of Reifenhäuser GmbH & Co. KG, Troisdorf; Dr. Karlheinz Bordon, Vice President Technologies of KraussMaffei Technologies GmbH, Munich; Helmut Heinson, managing director in charge of sales at Arburg GmbH & Co KG, Lossburg, all in Germany, and Dr. Peter Neumann, chairman of the managing board at Engel Austria GmbH, Schwertberg, Austria (photo: VDMA)

For the first time producers of plastics and rubber machines stepped on the public stage under the flag of the VDMA Blue Competence sustainability initiative. At a press event on the trade show site in Friedrichshafen, experts from VDMA companies discussed their individual focuses on the sustainability issue. Almost 40 member companies of the

VDMA plastics and rubber machinery association are partners of the initiative today; many of them were also exhibitors at Fakuma. Sustainability means a challenge to the plastics sector in two respects: First, in the development of lightweight products and, second, in the optimization of manufacturing processes. "Our job as machinery and plant producers is to supply the instruments required by processors in order to save energy and raw materials; we also have to provide the basic technology for sustainable final products," ex-

plains Ulrich Reifenhäuser, chairman of the plastics and rubber machinery sector on the occasion of the Blue Competence launch. "Our machinery industry's high export share gives proof of our achievements in these areas," adds Reifenhäuser.

Facing this challenge has a long-standing tradition in plastics and rubber machinery industry. By participating in Blue Competence, producers make this clear. "Over the past 20 years, the sector has doubled output, while at the same time reducing machine-specific energy con-

Translated from *Kunststoffe* 12/2012, pp. 20–21

Article as PDF-File at www.kunststoffe-international.com; Document Number: PE111228

sumption by a third. According to an Euromap study, the predictions concerning energy efficiency are trend-setting too: For machine-specific energy consumption, the potential of saving that is achievable by 2020 is estimated at another 20 percent," says Thorsten Kühmann, managing director of the VDMA sector.



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Energy Measuring Standards Promotes Transparency

Due to recently established European law, and also because of clear requirements coming from customers, it is indispensable to make plastics and rubber machines' consumption data more transparent and thus facilitate comparison. The new issue of Euromap 60 – published at the end of 2012 – ruling machine-specific energy measurement for injection molding machines represents a useful solution to improve measured results. "With energy measurements divided up between machine- and product-related data, we are able to meet the political requirements as well as customer demands," states Dr. Karlheinz Bourdon, Vice President Technologies at KraussMaffei Technologies GmbH in Munich, Germany. Apart from constant enhancement of machine technology, especially for customized and integrated processes, there is a vast poten-

tial for the production of plastics parts, e.g. with high-end premium surfaces, in a cost- and resource-efficient way, according to KraussMaffei. "The high demand for our single-stage procedures such as Colorform, Skinform and Coverform confirm this. With these processes we set benchmarks for our industry," claims Bordon.

Machine Production is where Sustainability Starts

To many suppliers of plastics and rubber machines, though, sustainability begins before their machines and plants go into service at the processor. In addition to employing efficient machine technology, companies such as Arburg GmbH & Co. KG in Lossburg, Germany, stand for sustainable and resource-saving production by interconnecting production and building technology. "At our production site, we use renewable energy sources, e.g. wind and solar power, innovative heating and cooling systems and geothermics. Since, no matter whether we look at the production processes at our own sites, or at our customers' – efficient and high-end production always means: low raw material consumption, low energy input, low amount of waste," stresses Arburg managing director Helmut Heinson.

Recycling Supports Resource-efficiency

With resources becoming more and more scarce and expensive, recycling of plastics or employing alternative materials is growing increasingly important. Ulrich Reifenhäuser, managing partner of Reifenhäuser GmbH & Co. KG in Troisdorf, Germany, mentions wood

plastic composites as an example to make this clear: "WPC products are added up to 80 percent of wood dust as early as during production, thus saving expensive plastics raw materials. Moreover, WPC products can be recycled several times without loss in quality, which is due to the technologies the process is based on."

Sustainability Implies Efficiency

According to Dr. Peter Neumann, chairman of the managing board at Engel Austria GmbH in Schwertberg, Austria, sustainability is obviously linked to efficiency in business operation: "Sustainability also means cost efficiency. To meet the aim of improving the qualities of our lives, we as entrepreneurs are in charge of safeguarding the futures of our production sites, first of all. We can only provide for this if we maintain our competitiveness in the long term. Subsequently, we need to develop solutions that are suited to meet the requirements concerning technology, ecology and society, while being attractive in terms of cost for the client. For instance, in the area of high-performance applications for the packaging industry, using all-electric injection molding machines significantly reduces energy consumption and cost per unit at the same time." Such innovative capacity the manufacturer of injection molding machines owes to its highly qualified staff. Skill and knowledge is thus one of the company's key resources. "For years, Engel has been involved in co-operation with schools and universities. For example, the enterprise played a leading role when the chair of plastics technology ("Lehrstuhl für Kunststofftechnik") at the University of Linz, Austria, was established. ■

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