

Bayer set to become world's leading manufacturer of polycarbonate with Makrolon

Investments totaling one billion Euros by 2005

Polycarbonate capacity increased to 1.3 million tons

Leverkusen – With a major investment package totaling some one billion Euros, Bayer is setting its sights on becoming the world's number one producer of polycarbonates within the next five years. "We plan to double our Makrolon® capacities from their present level of 650,000 tons/year to something approaching 1.3 million tons/year by 2005," declared Dr. Hagen Noerenberg, General Manager of the Plastics Business Group. Bayer will then have a total of five production centers for Makrolon strategically positioned in all the world's key economic regions. "This will enable us to fully meet the needs of our customers worldwide," said Noerenberg, explaining Bayer's ambitious plans.

The main focus of this capacity expansion will be on the booming markets in Asia-Pacific, where Bayer expects double-digit growth rates for polycarbonate. In the company's Map Ta Phut, Thailand, production plant, capacity is to be increased in two stages from its current level of 50,000 tons/year to 350,000 tons/year by 2005. In its expansion plans for Asia, the company also intends to step up the production of Makrolon at its new facility in the Caojing Chemical Park in Shanghai, China from 50,000 tons in 2003 to 100,000 tons/year by the end of 2004.

Rapid expansion of its capacities in Europe and the U.S.A. is also on Bayer's agenda. Output from the European production sites in Uerdingen, Germany and Antwerp, Belgium is scheduled to increase to a total of 500,000 tons/year by 2005, while production at the Baytown, U.S.A. plant will reach an annual 350,000 tons over the same time period.

As regards supplies to the European market, the most recent development was the start-up of the new melt carbonate plant in Antwerp in August of this year. Following a short warming-up period, this facility can now produce 40,000 tons/year of polycarbonate for all of Makrolon's viscosity grades. "This resource represents a milestone in technology," explained Dr. Noerenberg. "It provides Makrolon of excellent quality with outstandingly good optical properties." At present it is planned to use the product in applications where these characteristics are of particular importance.

Makrolon is an exceptionally versatile material that is widely used in the electrical and electronic sector, in lighting engineering and optical applications, in the manufacture of household and consumer goods, in the traffic and transport sector, and in the production of medical equipment. Other outstandingly successful applications include optical storage media such as CDs and DVDs, and multi-wall, solid and corrugated sheet as lightweight, break resistant glazing elements for the construction sector. The greatest asset of Makrolon – developed by Bayer in 1953 – is its balanced property profile. It is a transparent, impact resistant, high-strength material boasting a heat resistance of well over 100 °C and offering simple, economical processing.

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