

Belting good news from Dunlop



Dunlop's new factory site extension, depicted in red.

Despite the gloomy world economic situation, Netherlands-based Dunlop Conveyor Belting (part of the Fenner Dunlop Group) is enjoying unprecedented success. With an order book at record levels, they are forging ahead with a 6.4 million euro factory expansion programme.

The first objective is to install a new, 12-metre long 'double daylight' press, which is urgently needed to increase production. The press is due for delivery during June with the intention to be up and running by mid-August. The next stage is to install a steelcord production line for the first time ever in their Drachten production plant.

Although actual production of steelcord is not expected before January 2013, news of Dunlop's expansion is certainly raising eyebrows within the industry. "Many traders and end-users believe that we are far too expensive and that there is very little demand for high quality belts," says sales and marketing director Andries Smilda. "The fact that we are increasing our capacity because our order books are so full is hopefully making them realize that there are still a lot of companies out there who do actually want quality and are prepared to pay for it".

FOCUSING ON QUALITY

Apart from servicing an existing base of customers located in more than 150 countries worldwide, Dunlop employs a range of strategies in order to maintain growth. The historical cornerstone of competing on quality and lowest lifetime cost rather than price continues to be its primary weapon in seeking new customers.

"We focus a great deal on companies that have demanding applications such as premature wear or who are experiencing problems such as belt surface cracking due to ozone exposure," explains general sales manager, Les Williams. "Supplying belts that are resistant to the effects of ozone is particularly relevant to coastal based operations, where ground level ozone is more concentrated. The cracking causes pollution (spillage) leading to premature replacement even though the covers are not completely worn. We find that if we can impress customers by solving tough problems then they will more likely try our more 'standard' belts. The difficult part is to get the first order. After that, winning more orders is usually quite easy because they will have seen the advantages of Dunlop quality at first hand".

According to Williams, it is not just the quality of the product that helps to gain and maintain custom. "Our customers also get the very best technical advice and support. If we can save them money by using a different specification then we will. Many

companies use belts that are 'over dimensioned' and especially covers that are thicker than they should really need because the belts they are using wear out too fast". "I would say that many end-users do not always fully understand conveyor belt technology so for that reason, they do not realize that you may pay a higher price per metre initially but save a lot of money by not having to replace the belt two or three times in the same period".

The growing emphasis on safety, such as genuinely fire resistant or anti-static belts, and rubber compounds which do not contain chemicals and substances that could potentially be harmful to people or livestock also appears to be working in Dunlop's favour.

SMELLING THE DIFFERENCE

Dunlop claim to be the first manufacturer to achieve full compliance with REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemical substances) regulation EC 1907/2006. Although not commonly known by consumers, all European manufacturers (not just those who make conveyor belts) are legally obliged to comply with the regulations including the registration of potentially hazardous raw material elements listed within the regulations with ECHA (European Chemical Agency) headquarters in Helsinki. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, many manufacturers have chosen to ignore this legal requirement, either completely or at least partially because of the impact on production costs.

A wide variety of chemicals are used in conveyor belt manufacturing such as accelerators used in the vulcanization process. One of the biggest concerns involves the use of short-chain chlorinated paraffin's (SCCP's). Because of their category 3 carcinogenic classifications and their threat to the environment, REACH regulations stipulate that SCCP's should either not be used at all or only used on a strictly controlled basis. The unpleasant smell given off by some rubber products can be a strong indicator that chlorinated paraffin's have been used within the rubber compound.

Manufacturers outside of the EU, such as Asia for example, are not, of course, legally subject to the regulations and are therefore free to use unregulated raw materials and chemicals, even though they may be regarded as extremely hazardous within the European community.



A Dunlop lab technician testing chemicals.

AT YOUR SERVICE

Dunlop is also expanding its network of Dunlop Service centres, having successfully established centres in Holland, Spain, two in Poland, two in Italy, Morocco and, most recently, the Canary Islands.