

Germany's Lanxess to build two butyl rubber pilot plants in Belgium

German specialty chemicals producer Lanxess plans to build two new pilot plants at Zwijndrecht in Belgium for the development of its butyl rubber technology, the company said in a statement Thursday.

At the end of 2011, Lanxess raised its BR capacity at Zwijndrecht by 10% to 150,000 mt/year at an investment cost of Eur20 million (\$26.2 million).

The expansion was completed several months ahead of schedule, Evonik said.

The majority of Zwijndrecht's butyl rubber production is focused on premium halobutyl rubber, used in the production of tires.

"In the coming decade, we expect demand to grow further so that the new capacities here in Zwijndrecht and from our upcoming plant in Singapore will be fully absorbed by the market," the head of the butyl rubber business unit at Lanxess, Ron Commander, said.

In addition to the expansion in Zwijndrecht, Lanxess is building a new butyl rubber facility on Jurong Island, Singapore, with a total capacity of 100,000 mt/year. The plant, which represents the company's single-largest investment ever, is expected to start up in the first quarter of 2013.

Lanxess' other facilities include a 150,000 mt/year butyl rubber plant in Sarnia, Canada.

Butyl rubbers are used in tire inner liners — the innermost, air- and humidity-impermeable layer of a tubeless tire. They keep tire pressure constant over a long period, thus making vehicles safer and ensuring they consume less fuel and therefore produce fewer emissions.

Butyl rubbers can also be used in the tread of a tire allowing greater grip and comfort. Special applications include protective clothing and medical devices. The use of butyl in chewing gum production represents one particularly interesting niche market, Lanxess added.

