

“Solutions that make the world a cleaner place”

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CRI Catalyst Leuna GmbH: a global player in its sector

A direction system guides visitors around Leuna Chemical Park – “CRI Catalyst” can be read on the top of one of the production plants. In total, some 3,000 tonnes of catalysts are developed and manufactured here per year. “The catalyst is ultimately a question of trust,” explains Managing Director Holger Günschel. The talk is of tablets, capsules, granulate, powder ... without which almost no chemical process is able to work. CRI Catalyst Leuna GmbH is one of the market leaders in this field – and it is a company which looks back on a long tradition and one in which many customers place their trust all over the world.

“CRI stands for CRI/Criterion Catalysts & Technologies. Behind this name is a 100 percent subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Shell group,” explains Holger Günschel. The words “CRI Delivering Innovation” are written on his business cards – and they hold true, as Leuna isn’t just a place where catalysts are manufactured, it is also where their research and development takes place. The plant is home to 122 employees and has a range of some 100 different catalysts for use in the chemicals and petrochemicals industries.

Why are new catalysts required all over the world? “On the one hand, the users want to operate their systems more efficiently,” explains Günschel, “on the other hand, they want their raw materials to result in higher product output of even higher quality. That means no more oil, no more wax, and no more fuel without these “process regulators”. In technical terms, the applications of the products from CRI Catalyst range from the hydration of hydrocarbon fractions to the conversion of materials in the processing of crude oil and natural gas, through to the hydration of nitro-aromatics for the production of synthetic materials and synthetic resins.

A flourishing location: Leuna Chemical Park

Big companies were interested in the production of catalysts as long ago as the initial privatisation of the individual business lines of the former Leuna works (Leuna Werke) began in 1990. “As far as Shell, or to put it more precisely their subsidiary CRI/Criterion Catalysts were concerned, we proved to be a perfect match for their business portfolio,” says Holger Günschel. Günschel, who holds a degree in process engineering, has been part of the business since 1981 and was there as a 30-year-old when it was privatised in 1998. “Shell put its faith in our professional expertise and our motivation to ensure the company’s survival,” explains Günschel. When CRI/Criterion Catalysts decided to set up a new location in Leuna, it placed its trust in the local team, and under Günschel’s management, the company has now been conquering world markets for nearly 20 years. Yet Günschel would be the first to admit that the success has been achieved along with many others, and not just him.

The noise of lawnmower engines is making its way through the windows. The gardeners have finished their lunchbreak. Günschel smiles: the gardens outside were something he pushed for when the air here was cleaned up. These days, there are entire generations of staff for whom the green grass, rose borders, shrubs and trees are a matter of course. Günschel’s generation tends to look at the “flourishing landscapes” here a little differently. When he talks of the old days and hard work, he means the environmental pollution and the lack of almost everything that was needed to manufacture the goods. “Despite this, we were the leading manufacturer of catalysts for the Eastern Block,” he says, before going on to explain that Leuna had been a centre for catalyst production for many years before that as well.

Know-how for the world market

The story of the Leuna works began with the first cut of the spade for the construction of an ammonia plant in 1916. In 1921, production of the first catalysts for ammonia synthesis began, and commercial catalysts have been manufactured here ever since – at CRI Catalyst Leuna GmbH, with a considerable degree of know-how: the company’s research department develops customer-specific solutions and offers comprehensive support in the fields of product care and technical service. “Our customers value the entire package, which is one of our strengths,” explains Managing Director Günschel, returning to the subject of trust. CRI Catalyst Leuna is now one of the five to six world market leaders in the sector. It goes without saying that energy company Shell – which has one of the biggest tank networks in the world – works with catalysts from Leuna. “We supply the catalysts for the Fischer-Tropsch process, which is important for one of the process steps in the gas to liquid procedure,” explains Günschel.

Multi-million investment for new products

CRI Catalyst has now been prospering on the world markets with quality that’s “Made in Leuna” for several years. The company makes use of sales offices in Asia, Great Britain and the USA. It has international co-operations, including partnerships with local universities and Shell research centres in America, India and the Netherlands. “We seek and find solutions which make the world a cleaner place,” says Günschel, turning to the company’s research work in the area of the energy revolution. Whether it is catalysts for cleaning the airborne emissions at industrial plants or for the use of biomass – for the multi-talented firm from Leuna there are certain to be many more areas in which its applications can go into future use, and CRI is prepared. The company has recently invested several million Euros in a new system which has just gone into operation – and not just to increase its production volumes. “We will continue to work on new products here, for IH₂ technology, for example,” explains Günschel. With the use of this thermal catalyst process, it is possible to create fuel from waste wood and biomass – an area in which CRI Catalyst wants to hire yet more highly qualified employees.

www.cricatalyst.com

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