

Brazilian entrepreneur producing universal plastics in Saxony-Anhalt



Along with Schkopau, the Wesseling location near Cologne also belongs to Braskem Europe GmbH. This is why Buchmann has offices not only in Schkopau but also in Wesseling as well as in the company's European headquarters in Frankfurt am Main. The 55-year-old graduate engineer in materials technology is a specialist in polypropylene. He is familiar with the world of polymers. In fact he is at home in it. He has headed the manufacture of polypropylene in the chemical triangle in Central Germany since the commissioning of the Schkopau polypropylene plant in 1998 by the American Dow Chemical Company.

'The takeover of the Dow polypropylene business by Braskem two years ago was a stroke of luck for us', explains Buchmann, a native of Schkopau. 'We have now obtained a strong parent company that perceives its core business to be the production of polypropylene'. Thanks to the Braskem shareholder Petrobras, the fourth-largest oil company in the world, there is a strong partner on hand to secure the raw material basis. Since the takeover, several million Euros have been invested every year in Schkopau and Wesseling for the further development of the plants. The takeover of the Dow polypropylene business in the USA and Europe has enabled Braskem not only to consolidate its leadership in the American polypropylene market but also improve its position in Europe, Buchmann explained. In his words, the Brazilian company is pursuing plans extending far into the future. In Mexico, a chemical complex with two polyethylene plants is currently under construction with an investment running into the billions. In Brazil, the company possesses its own crackers. By 2015, the Schkopau plant will be completely converted to a new, commercial process control system, thereby creating the foundation for also producing other types of plastic as a result of subsequent investment. This will make the plant fit for new products demanded by the market. Moreover, with its worldwide staff of 7,500 employees, Braskem is pursuing the ambitious objective of becoming the world market leader in sustainable chemical development by 2020. In Brazil, it is already manufacturing polyethylene based on sugar cane in an industrial-scale plant. A pilot plant for the production of polypropylene from the same renewable raw material has been launched. The question of sugar cane does not arise for Schkopau, however. For years, the plant has been operating at the limit of its capacity with an annual production of 350,000 tonnes. Last year, the 55 employees working there achieved a turnover of ca. € 380 m. A similar result is also expected for the current year by Buchmann, a materials technology graduate of the Technical University in neighbouring Merseburg.

According to Buchmann, polypropylene - a universal plastic with an enormous range of applications - is an attractive material. It is also comparatively inexpensive to manufacture. 'The year-on-year growth in demand for polypropylene worldwide is between four and five per cent,' he emphasises. Thanks to the advantages provided by polypropylene, it is now replacing other plastics, such as PVC, PET or polyethylene, in some areas. It also helps that polypropylene can be worked in many ways. It is equally suitable for injection moulding as for extrusion, for blow moulding as for hot working, for welding as for deep drawing. This opens up a wide-ranging field of applications, including automobile manufacturing, medicine, agriculture, building construction and shipbuilding, as well as toys and household articles. Buchman adds that the biggest demand comes from the packaging industry. Brakem Europe supplies both end customers as well as 'distributors and intermediate customers', who first further process the granulate before themselves delivering to their own end customers. As examples, the Braskem Manager gives the furniture dealer Ikea, one of the biggest compounders for thermoplastic synthetics Ravago, as well as key plastics packaging manufacturers such as Jokey Plastik or Gizeh.

At the K 2013, the world's premier trade fair for plastics and rubber, Braskem Global will be represented with its own booth (Hall o6, Booth D27), at which it will demonstrate the Group's performance, Buchmann announced, although admitting that Schkopau was a comparatively small-scale location in the Braskem scheme of things. At the K 2013, however, he will to some extent playing a home game. 'The company's top people are coming to Germany. All the Vice-Presidents will be there in Düsseldorf. The Group's annual conference is being held there. Customers from all over the world are coming to this industry get-together', said Buchmann, looking ahead.

Discussions may well turn to the fact that the Braskem Group, created eleven years ago, is a member of the far larger and much older Brazilian Odebrecht Group of Companies, which employs 170,000 workers in a wide range of industries in 30 countries around the world. 'We were accepted into this family with open arms', reports Buchmann. He enjoys reminiscing about the fact that this global corporation has German roots. In fact, the company was founded by Emil Odebrecht, who emigrated from Greifswald in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to Brazil in 1865. The Odebrecht Group of Companies, which has a 51 per cent share in Braskem, is still controlled by the Odebrecht family. Alongside engineering services, energy, infrastructure, transport and logistics, real estate, sugar and the construction industry, its main business areas are predominately the chemical and petrochemical industries. In Brazil, Odebrecht is considered a pioneer of social activities. The Group develops projects in the fields of education, health, the environment and culture. And Braskem Europe GmbH in Schkopau also supports cultural and sports projects in the region. To give an example, € 10,000 were donated spontaneously to help those affected by the devastating floods this June.

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