

Where the chemistry is right

The Linde Group focuses on excellent infrastructure and expertise at the site in Leuna

White clouds decorate the bright blue sky over the chemical park in Leuna. The same colour can be found in the logo of the Linde Group as well as on the flags outside their factory building. But plant manager René Müller (43) also remembers the times when the sky above the former Leuna-Buna-Bitterfeld chemical triangle was just grey. Back then he learnt industrial engineering, control technology, measurement technology, and automatic control engineering at the Buna VEB chemical plant. The neighbouring plants in Leuna to the south of Halle/Saale were the largest companies in the chemical industry in the GDR. Founded as an ammonia plant in 1916, facilities were established here in the 1950s for the production of petrochemical raw materials. Investment in crude oil processing increased during the oil crises in the 1970s and 1980s.

Numerous companies have settled on the area of the former plant in Leuna. The chemical park, managed by InfraLeuna GmbH, comprises of a modern road network of 40 kilometres, 90 kilometres of railway tracks and 600 kilometres of pipelines as well as modern offices, factory workshops and warehouses.

The silver pipes glow in the sunshine. Due to the existing infrastructure of warehouses and pipelines, the Linde Group has the world's largest gases and engineering company, established as a technical gas centre and a hydrogen plant at the chemical site in Leuna in 1990. "We were the first private investor here", explains plant manager Müller and that over 500 million euros has so far been invested into the site in Leuna by the Linde Group.

Linde supplies central Germany's chemical sites in Leuna, Bitterfeld, Zeitz, Piesteritz and Böhlen with oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen via the pipeline network of 550 kilometres. Some industrial companies, such as Heraeus in Bitterfeld-Wolfen, are also connected by pipeline. Others are supplied by truck, such as Miltitz Aromatics GmbH in Bitterfeld-Wolfen, the Schott glass industry in Jena, the glass factory in Osterweddingen, and Salzgitter AG as well as companies from the semiconductor industry and the food and beverage industry.

"We not only benefit from the infrastructure but also from the technical competence and the acceptance of chemistry, which has been at home in this region for generations", says plant manager Müller. He knows what he is talking about. "The chemistry is right" is a nationwide student competition. The slogan also applies to his basic feelings of being at home in the chemical industry. His ties to the region go back to when he studied chemical engineering at the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. He has been plant manager at Linde since 2008.

The site in Leuna has worked on environmentally conscious projects in recent years. Linde AG currently offers attractive and technically demanding jobs for 550 employees including sales representatives. Project managers and service engineers at Linde build, repair and maintain complete gas supply systems and their technical equipment throughout Europe. The facilities are controlled from the two ROCs (Remote Operation Centres) in Leuna. Many of the employees including plant operators and engineers, who predominantly come from the region, have been with Linde from the beginning and have over 20 years of experience. The team is completed by colleagues from Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy and Romania. "They move here with their families in order to serve the customers from their home countries as "native speakers" from the Linde site in Leuna" says Müller.

The plant received a ministerial visitor in August. Sigmar Gabriel, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, visited the site in Leuna on his summer tour focused on the topic of energy transition in order to open discussions with those planning a "revolution" for the hydrogen energy economy in eastern Germany. HYPOS: Hydrogen Power Storage & Solutions East Germany – the research network of 82 partners so far from the Central German energy industry as well as from science and research – is a programme supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under the "Twenty20 – Partnership for Innovation" programme. It focuses on the conversion of non-storable energy from wind and solar plants into the storable energy source hydrogen through special chemical processes. Storage and transport of so-called green hydrogen, which is produced with low CO₂ emissions, require special technologies that are being researched and developed by HYPOS. "Simply brilliant", says René Müller, who believes that it is natural for Linde AG to participate in this "revolution". The plant possesses the most modern pipeline network for hydrogen in Europe. "In HYPOS lies the opportunity for an intelligent hydrogen network, in which existing and new qualities are linked to one another", says René Müller.

If a certain amount of green energy remains as a result of this conversion process in Central Germany and therefore does not have to be fed into the planned and hotly debated grid system, it could be used by companies based here.

It is planned that the HYPOS research will be ready to prosper in the period of 2020 to 2030 and that part of the surplus energy from renewable energies of the Central German chemical industry will be available as green hydrogen. A milestone of HYPOS is the hydrogen model region of Central Germany.

"Green" prospects for Linde AG and its customers.

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