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Upgrades at the Chemprene facility include a new Shaw-Almex press, automated mixing system, new Rotocure and a four-roll calender. Installations will be made over the next year.

Ammega invests \$14M, Chemprene team looks to future

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BEACON, N.Y.—When Chemprene L.L.C. was acquired by the Ammega Group in July 2018, the prospect of major capital upgrades for the 60-year-old manufacturer of lightweight rubber belting became a very real possibility. In September, Ammega announced a \$14 million investment in the company, representing the largest in Chemprene's history, as the manufacturer looks to improve production efficiency and overall capacity at its 225,000-sq.-ft. facility in Beacon, just north of New York City. "This investment will enable us to gain production uptime, meaning more manufacturing capacity for our growing



Tom McCoy

business," said Chemprene General Manager Tom McCoy. "Most importantly, it will increase our product portfolio and enhance our ability to work with our customers on any and all of their needs." The investments are four-pronged and slated for completion within the next 12 months. They include the installation of a new press, a state-of-the-art mixing automation system, a new Rotocure and a modern four-roll calender. "The \$14 million will go toward a machinery investment to modernize our processes and capabilities, as well as give us much-needed extra capacity that the market demands," McCoy told Rubber News. Specifically, the machinery will boost Chemprene's capacity by 25 percent or more. "These projects (also) will

help improve our quality and reduce maintenance downtime," McCoy said.

Notable of the installations is the press from Shaw-Almex Industries Ltd., which offers a unique membrane press system. Traditional presses use large, high-pressure, hydraulic rams to generate the massive pressure needed to cure, laminate, vulcanize or mold the end-product. McCoy said this method can have drawbacks by causing uneven pressure along the platen. The Shaw-Almex press applies uniform pressure.

"The key is the pressure bag principle," McCoy said. "This patented system utilizes an inflatable rubber pressure member to develop perfectly uniform pressure which is much different than standard designed presses."

The mixer automation systems also have some key benefits, as Chemprene now has the ability to automate many tasks that once were done by hand. This brings the ability to monitor and store analytics from the production line as well, and decreases production costs—namely through the dreaded downtime.

The automation will increase quality and uniformity from batch-to-batch, McCoy said, "by taking human error out of the equation.

"It will also reduce waste and the use of many bags of chemicals," he said, providing a cleaner environment and a safer workplace through reduced material handling.

Chemprene's flagship product continues to be its ZipLink belting, based on a low-stretch polyester monofilament carcass that combines cover materials with a structured-link mesh.

This enables easy splicing at any length, without the need for tools or presses.

"In turn, this eliminates hours of downtime—which is enemy No. 1 in an industry using conveyor belts," McCoy said. "Chemprene was the first to offer Ziplink belts to the industry and can offer the technical expertise associated with this type of belt."

Chemprene typically works with a wide variety of polymer and fabric materials with its belting, coated fabric and diaphragm products. Polymers include nitrile, SBR, natural rubber, silicone, butyl, EPDM, neoprene, FKM and Teflon.

Fabrics include polyester and polyester/nylon, Kevlar and Nomex, among many others.

And there is not a raw material on the list that has not been affected by supply chain issues, McCoy said.

"The entire supply chain has been challenged this year," he said. "Fabrics, polymers and chemicals have seen force majeure, transportation issues, allocations and incredibly long lead times."

It has been the all-important customer relationships that have supported Chemprene, McCoy said.

"Chemprene has always enjoyed a great relationship with all our suppliers," he said. "As these supply chain issues began, these relationships helped guide us through the rough waters.

"In some cases, we have added extra stock in our inventory so we have the necessary materials to help us reduce lead times. Overall, however, the supply chain has been the No. 1 challenge at Chemprene this year."

Pricing volatility continues in concert with supply chain issues and the difficulty in procuring on-time transportation. McCoy said some polymers have stabilized, while silicones and plasticizers have "endured double-digit price increases."

"Price volatility has been present in all the materials we currently procure," McCoy said. "All materials have seen this volatility. While the number and timing of the increases have slowed down a little, there is still price volatility out there until the supply chain is able to balance itself." Chemprene has been a well-known player in the belting industry for decades, starting with military-coated fabric products. The product range was expanded to include automotive and specialty diaphragm applications, and conveyor belting was added in the mid-1960's.

The company serves a range of industries, including food and vegetable processing applications; tire and rubber processing applications; airport baggage and package handling markets; marine applications; hydraulic packing and seal materials for oil and gas drilling; and aerospace and defense applications.

"We are a customer-focused company

that is here to service any of our existing or new customers," McCoy said.

Chemprene is a part of the Ammega Conveyor Solution Business, which also comprises Ammeraal Beltech, AVE, Green Belting, Rappalon, Sampla and Uni.

Engineered belt business relocates

The \$14 million Chemprene investment comes on the heels of a \$19 million investment for the Ammega Group, which recently announced plans for a new Ammeraal Beltech greenfield manufacturing plant and a relocation of its Megadyne Engineered Belt business. Megadyne's engineered specialty belt business completed its relocation from Cumming, Ga., to Buford, Ga., in October.

"The new location is 2.5 times larger than the former site, allowing Megadyne to expand its rubber molding, spin casting, coating and product modification business," said Steve Facetti, vice president of marketing for the Americas segment at Ammega.

In addition, new automated storage equipment will enable the Buford facility to stock more rubber and urethane base-belt substrates, largely used as the foundation of the finished products.

The \$19 million, 125,000-sq.-ft. facility in Hall County will produce lightweight rubber belts for a range of industries, with a specific focus on the food and logistics spaces, and create 83 jobs.

The Georgia facility will support Ammega's continued growth in the U.S., as it joins other belting facilities in Skokie, Ill. (production, fabrication and U.S. conveying headquarters); Lackawanna, N.Y. (fabrication); Grand Prairie, Texas (fabrication); and the Pennsylvania cities of Reading (production, modular belts) and Jefferson (fabrication).