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Date 18 October 2018

Ecologic responsibility and economic opportunities – from the turnaround to everyday suitability of the Circular Economy

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Frankfurt, 18 October 2018 – The notion of Circular Economy has long since been established in the plastics industry. It is not only about the “if” anymore, but about the “how”. How can we increase the amount of plastics in the circle, so that it is not lost as a valuable resource anymore?

During today’s VDMA press tour at the international trade fair for plastics processing, Fakuma, company representatives of KraussMaffei, ARBURG, ALIPLAST/Plastics Recyclers Europe PRE, Motan, Sumitomo (SHI) Demag and ENGEL share their experiences and talk about the challenges that they see regarding the implementation of the Circular Economy.

Strengthening the interconnectedness and cooperation within the value chain

Thorsten Kühmann, Managing Director of VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery, is convinced: “Circular Economy has arrived at mechanical engineering. We take over responsibility and can also make an important contribution as mechanical engineers. We deem it very important that the partners of the circular economy get to know each other better and develop a

deeper understanding of the interests and needs, but also of the opportunities and boundaries of the others. We consider it an important task of our association to offer a respective platform and bring participants together.”

Dr. Frank Stieler, CEO of the KraussMaffei Group, has a similar stance: “To establish a circular economy for plastics, a good cooperation and close coordination between partners is fundamental. KraussMaffei is already working together with other machinery manufacturers, for example, Austrian machinery manufacturer and recycling expert Erema.”

That taking over responsibility for sustainable thinking and acting, and profitable business models do not exclude each other, is also recognised by the VDMA members. Stieler admits: “The KraussMaffei Group promotes a responsible treatment of plastics. Establishing a circular economy for plastics, therefore, plays an important role. Besides ecologic responsibilities, we also clearly see economic opportunities.”

Reliable recyclate qualities and quantities increase market acceptance

However, economic opportunities do not come out of nowhere. The acceptance by processors, the big brands and end customers of recyclates and products made from recyclates is central to the success of a circular economy – also in an international context.

Dr. Christoph Schumacher, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at ARBURG GmbH + CO KG gives a comprehensive approach to the matter: “It’s high time that we put all our attention to the question how plastic products can be best integrated – economically, technologically and ecologically sensibly – into a circular economy that is as globally structured as possible.”

In order for processors to increasingly use recyclates for the production of plastic products, they need reliable material qualities in sufficient amounts. These may only be obtained if enough recyclable plastic waste can be collected. The key to increase recycling rates is the product design in the sense of “design for recycling”, but also a better waste management on EU level. Paulo Glerean, Business Development & Institutional Affairs at ALIPLAST, Italy, board member of the Plastics Recyclers Europe PRE, supports the efforts to improve the plastics recycling in Europe: “It is important to emphasise that efforts of all the value chain actors, including consumers, must be put on improving all of the different steps of plastics manufacture, usage phase and disposal. Only in such a way can we succeed with an effective waste management for plastics and eventually make them fully circular. PRE is dedicated to continuously support different industries, to improve recyclability of their products and to accelerate the transition towards circular economy, via its various platforms like RecyClass.”

Mechanical engineering as enabler – Digitalisation as important factor for supporting the Circular Economy

What can mechanical engineering do? “We are the enablers, that is our actual business model,” Schumacher puts it into a nutshell. To transform challenges of the markets into innovative technology solutions has been the expertise of plastics and rubber machinery manufacturers for decades – as it is for injection moulding machine manufacturer Arburg.

The Materials Handling expert, Motan, uses the digitalisation of its plants to face the special requirements, which arise from the conveyed goods made from plastics recycling:

“The physical qualities of recyclates are never as good as new material. That means that also the handling processes of these materials are more complex if the quality of the final product is to be maintained. Here, Industry 4.0 can perfectly support the Circular Economy. The various technologies under the umbrella of Industry 4.0 are the main tool for the implementation of the circular economy strategy. At the same time, such a contribution to the circular economy business model gives the development of Industry 4.0 a purpose and a direction,” Sandra Füllsack, CEO of motan holding gmbh is convinced. “Industry 4.0 prepares the path for the Circular Economy in the plastics industry. The increasing intelligence of injection moulding machines enables stable processes, even if the quality varies. Accordingly, recyclates may be used more widely,” adds Dr. Christoph Steger, CSO, ENGEL Holding.

Engel, as a member of the international plastics industry, feels responsible for supporting the Circular Economy and to contribute its expertise in the development of sustainable, resource-friendly technologies.

Call for Circular Economy noticeable also in Asian markets

Increasing demands for sustainability and circular economy models are noticeable also on global markets, for example Asia. Gerd Liebig, CEO Sumitomo (SHI) Demag GmbH, confirms this: “Our customers in Asia put more and more emphasis on the use of recyclable material. New materials, like for example biopolymers, are used to a greater extent. It is also attempted to find solutions to reduce the amount of shredded plastics and used materials as well as to reduce energy consumption.”

Liebig also reports: “However, marine litter by microplastics is a reason in the Asian region to introduce stricter rules for plastics recycling. The water pollution drastically reduces fish populations and therefore has a direct impact on the food industry, namely the provision with fish, which especially in Japan belongs to the main food sources.”

Do you have further questions? Please contact Ina Vettkötter, VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery Communications, phone + 49 69 6603 1844, ina.vettkoetter@vdma.org.

Further links:

plastics.vdma.org

About VDMA Plastics and Rubber Machinery

More than 200 companies are members of the association, covering more than 90 percent of the branch production in Germany. Ten percent of our member companies come from Austria, Switzerland and France. The German member companies represent sales of EUR 7 billion in core machine engineering and EUR 10 billion including peripheral technology. Every fourth plastic machine produced in the world comes from Germany; the export rate is 70 percent. Ulrich Reifenhäuser, Member of the Management Board of the Reifenhäuser Group, is the chairman of the association.