IF Spotlight

Customer newsletter of the IFS Group

Summer 2005

Success requires partnerships

THE GLOBAL POLYURETHANE INDUSTRY IS EXPERIENCING CONTINUED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN ALL AREAS OF THE BUSINESS. IN THE UK, CHANGES IN THE BUILDING REGULATIONS HAVE RESULTED IN INCREASED OUTPUT FROM INSULATION MANUFACTURERS AND AT IFS WE HAVE BEEN EXPERIENCING AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF NEW ENQUIRIES FOR POLYURETHANE CHEMICALS. OUR TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM CONTINUES TO PRODUCE NEW, INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS FOR INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED MARKETS.

Managing Director, Barrie Colvin

We now have a full range of products for the sub-sea pipeline industry as well as high clarity elastomers for specialist applications. We have also finalised our developments on a range of highly fire retardant products utilising novel techniques, which give rise to excellent performance at moderate cost. All of these developments have been accomplished by forming a partnership with carefully chosen companies. In this manner we work for the exclusive benefit of our partners to ensure that they are provided with the latest, most innovative chemical systems on the market.

Contents:

Page 2:

- Protecting the pipeline
- West African contract
- Did you know?

Page 3:

- Regenerated street furniture
- Laboratory investment at IFS

Page 4:

- Spotlight on...
- Anti-fouling solution
- Contacts

One of the main challenges for IFS over the past months has been the sourcing of sufficient raw materials to satisfy the requirements of existing customers in the UK. Lack of investment by the major raw material producers, combined with high demand from emerging polyurethane markets, has led to a shortage in the industry. The major players have felt the need to allocate chemicals both to end-users and to specialist formulators such as IFS. As the majors have all made significant changes to their strategy for servicing the UK market, independent systems houses have had to alter their own policies with regard to developing strategic partnerships in the marketplace. IFS has significant plans to grow over the next twelve months, particularly in niche markets requiring a high level of technical service assistance. Plans are in place to modify our relationships with certain raw material producers with the overall aim of securing base products at high volume and reasonable prices. By choosing the right partners we can continue to supply quality, innovative products to the UK market.

Did you know?

- UTECH Europe 2006, a major international exhibition for Europe's polyurethanes industry will be held at the Maastricht Exhibition & Conference Centre from 28-30 March 2006. Further details can be obtained from David Reed on 020 7457 1407.

- Envirofoam Chemicals Ltd, IFS's subsidiary in the field of natural oil based polyurethanes, has recently featured in the August / September edition of Urethanes Technology, the leading industry publication. Managing Director, Barrie Colvin described the progress made over the past twenty years including the transfer of technology to overseas markets.

- A new, high performance elastomer has been developed for use in the concrete moulding industry. The new product is the result of an extended research programme aimed at determining the effect of various concrete additives on the long-term performance of polyurethane elastomers. Commercial quantities will be available from September 2005.

New chemical system from IFS protects 1760 km pipeline

Cellafoam 35 protects against seismic activity.

IFS has played a fundamental role in the construction of the exciting new BTC oil pipeline running from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean. The 1,760 km pipeline taps into Caspian Sea oil reserves, having a capability of up to one million barrels per day.

Its course, from Azerbaijan to Ceyhan in Turkey, crosses hostile and unstable terrain. It encounters altitudes of 2,800 metres, crosses 1,500 watercourses, traverses the Cayhan River which is 5.2 metres deep and 500 metres wide and passes through areas of seismic activity. This is a pipeline sorely in need of protection, and IFS has played a vital role.

The pipeline has been designed for flexibility. IFS developed Cellafoam 35, a low density, open-celled, rigid foam system used to manufacture the polyurethane foam erosion breaker dams. These give the pipeline vital support and protection, whilst enabling it to flex in storm conditions or areas of seismic activity.

This has been a most exciting project for the company. The pipeline has been designed to last 40 years, fulfilling a major role in supplying the world's growing energy requirements. Cellafoam 35 is a unique product which will undoubtedly play a fundamental part in the achievement of this aim.

And in West Africa...

IFS is supplying a specially developed foam system to joint the pipes of a gas pipe line which will run for 580 km from Lagos in Nigeria to Takordi in Ghana, then along the coastlines of Togo and Benin. The overall concept is to carry the gas from Nigeria, with feeder spur lines to these energy-starved nations.

Brazos Horizon, specially designed and built for pipe laying.

It took almost 15 years to finalise the legal framework of the contract, which involved several governments. IFS has subsequently supplied a quantity of chemicals, over a 2-month period, for the project, which is expected to last 2 years. This major project involves 48,500 joints on runs of both 18 inch and 20 inch pipes. As the foaming operation is carried out at sea, the foam requires specific properties for use in a marine environment, and two special ships - the Brazos Horizon and the Sea Horizon - have been designed and built for the pipe-laying process.

The company won the contract based on both the excellence of chemical performance, and the proven ability to support the project using highly skilled technical personnel.

New street furniture 'regenerated' by Bollards International

Bollards International Limited has perfected a process which allows its stylish product range to be produced through the regeneration of used vehicle tyres. Through the technical expertise of IFS Chemicals, it has responded to the EC Landfill Directive which bans vehicle tyres from landfill sites from January 2006.

New for old - bollards manufactured from regenerated car tyres.

The UK currently produces over half a million tonnes of scrap tyres every year and the government is expecting complete recovery of value as a result of this Directive. Bollards International believes this is one of the reasons for the early interest from central government departments, local authorities, and a growing number of environmentally concerned commercial organisations.

Other manufacturers have tried a similar process, but have never been able to maintain an acceptable standard of quality. However the process formulated by IFS Chemicals using a high level of rubber crumb from shredded vehicle tyres, produces bollards of exceptionally quality. They are highly environmentally friendly, non-corrosive and virtually maintenance-free while having the re-assuring appearance of cast iron. The versatility of the material renders it able to accommodate most individual customer requirements, even incorporating logos, emblems and coats of arms into the design.

This process is a new formulation of an old concept. Bollards International has the IFS Chemicals' polymer engineers and their laboratory facilities on the same site as its production line, which streamlines the whole operation. Once finished in a top quality polyurethane paint finish, these bollards have great appeal to any organisation seeking to fulfil its environmental obligations.

Laboratory investment at IFS

IFS has recently made a substantial investment in laboratory facilities. As a result of increasing demand for new products, particularly in the area of speciality elastomers, the company has decided to double its laboratory work area and add several new dispensing machines to the prototyping laboratory.

IFS has always placed great emphasis on innovation and has gained a reputation for pioneering both chemical and technological solutions for the polyurethane market. The company was at the forefront of polyol development from natural oils, having sold this technology to various customers in several continents. In more recent times, emphasis has been placed on utilising regenerated materials for new applications. The manufacture of street furniture from regenerated tyres was followed by the use of reclaimed refrigerator foam in a variety of applications, thus reducing the detrimental effects of land-filling operations.

Enhanced laboratory facilities at IFS.

Success of this type has led to a well-deserved reputation as a company able to provide answers to challenging objectives in the polyurethane industry. The expansion of laboratory facilities is seen as a necessary development in order to ensure that the company retains its reputation for innovation in polyurethanes.

Spotlight on ... Ronnie Butler

Veronica - or Ronnie, as she prefers - has lived in West Norfolk with her husband, Mark, and 13-year old daughter, Maxime, since relocating for Mark's job. During her 7-year career with IFS, she has risen through the company from her first post as a temporary, part-time secretary [which quickly became permanent], progressing to a full-time position in customer services, then to Marketing Executive and finally to her present post as Administration Manager.

Ronnie Butler

Ronnie's work at IFS brings her into daily contact with both staff and customers; her previous extensive sales background with companies such as Parceline, Nightfreight, Avington Pharmaceuticals and TNT, has provided her with valuable experience for the face-to-face and telephone interaction needed for her present position.

Ronnie enjoys an active social life with her family and work colleagues. The IFS Administration team's regular Thursday nights out include Chinese meals, bowling, cinema and golf.

However, her main, and most regular outside activity is as husband Mark's chief supporter in his kitesurfing activities; her duties here include kite launching, kit carrying and line unknotting! All this is very pleasurable in exotic places such as Egypt, Ferteventura and Tenerife, where they have 'surfed' in the past two years - but Hunstanton in December? That's a very different scenario, but Ronnie is still there, with a smile and words of encouragement!

Ronnie says of herself, "I am a very positive and happy-go-lucky person, and I like to make sure that those around me are happy, or at least smiling. I love technology, and couldn't survive the day without my latest 'toy' - an MDA telephone, computer, MP3 player, and internet explorer rolled into one.

"I think West Norfolk is a fantastic place to live and bring up a child," she goes on to say. "But with parents living in Cyprus and a brother in Bulgaria, we're not short of places to take a holiday.

"My career with IFS has afforded me the opportunity to be involved in many aspects of the business, and I still learn something new every day."

IFS leads the way with unique anti-fouling solution

Many plastics, paints and elastomeric coatings contain ingredients to prevent the build-up of micro-organisms on their surface when used in sub-sea applications. Ships hulls have for many years been painted with anti-fouling grades of paint in order to minimise the attachment of barnacles, sea snails, algae and mussels. Conventional antifouling paints can control these organisms on underwater surfaces for up to five years before they need to be repainted.

The most common ingredient used in antifouling preparations is TBT - tributyl tin, which has been used in vast quantities since the 1960s. However, because of the adverse effects of tin compounds on marine life, legislation now prevents its use. In 2002 an international treaty was signed, banning the application of paint containing tin on all ships by the end of 2007.

In view of the fact that polyurethane elastomers are widely used in such marine applications as pipe coatings, buoys, fenders etc, IFS initiated a development programme to find tin

New elastomeric polyurethanes undergoing sea trials off the south coast.

replacements for use in marine-grade polyurethanes. Following a successful laboratory evaluation of candidate additives, sea trials began early last year. Samples of elastomeric polyurethanes were placed in the sea off the coast of Portsmouth and they are being regularly inspected for signs of marine growth.

To date, the results are excellent with several formulations providing results which are superior to those of specimens containing TBT.

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