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Celanese Emulsions

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# Fortron expands to meet demand





Thanks to an uptick in the market and increasing demand for Fortron® polyphenylene sulfide (PPS), Ticona joint venture company Fortron Industries is expanding capacity by 38% at its facility in Wilmington, North Carolina. “Right now we’re running at full capacity,” says Fred Daniell, president of Fortron Industries. “Expansion is critical to continue our growth.”

The multimillion dollar project is taking place in two stages, the first to be completed in 2004 during the plant’s December shutdown and the second by early 2006. “The first will help us to meet demand through 2005; the second, through 2007,” says Daniell. The company is currently conducting feasibility studies for a new PPS plant – to be built within the next five years at an undetermined location – in order to meet continuing growth in new and traditional PPS markets. Already formidable in automotive applications, Fortron PPS is expanding in such new areas as aerospace, filtration and extruded profiles as a result of their successful Technical Marketing efforts.

Utilizing Six Sigma tools to improve reliability and yield, the upgrade will apply new process technology that shortens polymerization and speeds throughput. Minimal new steel and equipment will be installed; some existing equipment will be replaced with larger in-kind equipment on existing foundations. “We’ll be working on a tight schedule to get it all done,” says Tom Provost, operations manager. The shutdown, which was originally planned for 24 days, will be reduced to 16 days or less through the use of Six Sigma tools and Maintenance Best Practices shared from other Celanese locations.

Referred to as “Debottlenecking Number Five,” Phase 2 of the project is already underway, thanks to a fast track approval process and Celanese global purchasing expertise, a first-time collaboration for Fortron Industries. Central to that phase of the project is a new Korean-built reactor, the facility’s third, that will increase polymerization output for products requiring a longer cycle time.

“This plant was built to expand,” says Provost, “but with Number Five we’re exceeding all original expectations.” Tie-in will begin in 2004; full operation is expected by the end of the first quarter of 2006. ❶

