Putting safety first, every day

By Bill Brogar
Plastics News Staff

Columbus, Ohio — Kina Hart lost her left arm in an industrial accident when she was 20 years old, working in a factory to pay for college.

It happened just after she started on her first day on the job. She told the story to kick off the Environmental Health and Safety Summit, held July 17-18 in Columbus.

An upbeat speaker, Hart mixed in poignant details and humor into her first-person account of how and why the serious accident happened — and how it impacted her family, friends and coworkers.

“The reason I share that story with you is that I know that’s how so many people are when it comes to their jobs. I know that every one of you here work really hard. Your employees work really hard. This isn’t just a job. It’s not just a paycheck,” she said.

Losing her arm at a young age was hard to overcome. She had to relearn how to do everyday things — tie her shoes, make a sandwich, open a jar of peanut butter.

And Hart said that could happen to anybody at any factory. She urged management to spell it out to new hires that no job is worth getting injured.

“This is the one time in our lives where we need to put ourselves first, when it comes to safety,” she said.

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The Environmental Health and Safety Summit was sponsored by the Manufacturers Association for Plastics Processors, the American Mold Builders Association and the Association for Rubber Products Manufacturers.

Yes, the money is important, Hart said. A manufacturing job pays the bills and puts food on the table. In Hart’s case, it was paying for college, where she dreamed of getting an education to become a dentist.

But I’m here to tell anybody that’ll listen to say there is no job, there’s no paycheck, there’s absolutely no amount of money that would ever be worth any part of you,” she said.

She wasn’t trained for her summer job at an Alaska salmon-processing plant. It did not have lockout/tag-out procedures for the conveyor belt that ripped off her arm. But Hart accepted that she shares some of the blame by not trusting her gut instinct that the job was hazardous. She “gave away [her] safety” — with tragic, life-changing consequences.

And Hart said that could happen to anybody at any factory. She urged management to spell it out to new hires that no job is worth getting injured.

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By Frank Esposito
Plastics News Staff

Industrial firm Textron Inc. is exploring options for its Kautex blow molding unit, including a possible sale.

In an Aug. 5 news release, officials with Providence, R.I.-based Textron said that the firm “is reviewing strategic alternatives” for Kautex Textron GmbH & Co. KG, including a sale, tax-free spinoff or other transaction.

Kautex is based in Bonn, Germany, and has more than 30 plants in 14 countries. It generated sales of more than $2.3 billion in 2018.

The company is the No. 8 largest blow molder in North America, according to Plastics News, with estimated sales in the region of $855 million. Among companies that specialize in blow molded fuel tanks, Kautex is No. 3, behind Plastic Omnium Auto Energy Division and ABC Group Inc.

Kautex has five plants in North America: Avilia, Ind.; Detroit; La-
vonia, Ga.; Puebla, Mexico; and Windsor, Ontario.

Kautex makes blow molded fuel tanks and advanced fuel systems for cars and light trucks, including pressurized fuel tanks for hybrid applications. The unit also develops and makes camera/sensor cleaning solutions for autos and catalytic reduction systems used to reduce emissions from diesel engines.

Kautex also makes cast iron engine components, exhaust manifolds and other engine components.

In the release, Textron Chairman and CEO Scott Donnelly described Kautex as “a leading Tier 1 supplier to global OEMs [that] has a long history of product innovation, world-class operations and strong financial performance.”

He added that Textron is “exploring strategic alternatives to see how we can position Kautex to best serve its customers for ongoing success while creating value for our shareholders.”

Bemis Healthcare Packaging

Europe merges with Nelipak

By Don Loepp
Plastics News Editor

As promised, Nelipak Corp. Inc. is growing globally under its new ownership.

In July, investment firm Kohlberg & Co. LLC acquired the major manufacturer of custom plastic packaging for the health care sector. At the time, Mount Kisco, N.Y.-based Kohlberg announced it had plans to leverage the business with “sizeable, global acquisitions.”

Kohlberg made good on the pledge Aug. 8, when it completed a previously announced deal to buy Bemis Healthcare Packaging Europe for $394 million — then immediately merged the unit with Nelipak.

The combined companies have footprints in both North America and Europe. Products include flexible and thermoformed packaging.
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& High Performance
V-RING

THE BLOWN FILM EXPERTS
ALPINE AMERICAN
Regional solid PS, PP, PET bottle resin prices up in July

By Frank Esposito

Plastics News Staff

North American prices for solid polystyrene, polypropylene and PET bottle resins each increased during the week of July, mainly as a result of higher feedstock prices.

In the other direction, regional polystyrene resin buyers who didn’t see a price drop in June saw one in July instead.

As the July statement said, “We’re still investigating the motive,” Kennedy said, “but apparently was not affected by the incident. But sources said PP markets might welcome that opportunity, especially since domestic PP demand hasn’t been strong so far in 2019.”

PET bottle resin also saw a 1-cent upward move in July. That move mainly was tied into higher feedstock prices. The July increase reversed a surprising trend that had seen prices for that material fall by 2 cents in June and by a total of 6 cents in the April-June period, when demand for bottled water and carbonated soft drinks typically is high.

Market sources said the domestic PET market remains well supplied, with bottled water usage attempting to make up for ongoing declines in CSD demand.

The PE resin pricing situation has been the cause of much debate in the domestic market for the last two months. Some PE buyers saw a 3-cent price spike in June, a move that may have begun when high density PE supplier lowered prices to some of its customers.

That 3-cent drop later spread through the rest of the market, reaching most buyers by the end of July. Sources said that momentum for the decline also may have come from less-than-robust domestic demand and from PE inventories that have been growing because of multiple capacity expansions and because of the impact of the U.S.-China trade war on PE exports from the U.S.

Market watchers also said that buying backsliding to a 3-cent increase that went through in April after being challenged by some PE users may have played a role in the 3-cent June and July price drop.

RTP buys Zeotherm TPV business

By Frank Esposito

Plastics News Staff

Materials firm RTP Co. has acquired the Zeotherm-brand thermoplastic Vulcanizate product line from Zeon Chemicals LP.

The deal — completed in May but announced in an Aug. 6 news release — includes all products sold globally under the Zeotherm TPV name, officials said with Winona, Minn.-based RTP said in the release.

“Zeotherm Zeotherm acquisition is just the latest step in our rapidly expanding thermoplastic elastomer business,” said RTP President and Manager Todd Gummersbach added in the release.

“The Zeotherm TPVs expand our product line, which includes compounds based on SEBS [styrene butadiene copolymers], COPE [polyether-block-amides], COPE [polyamide elastomers], COPE [polyester block-amides], and COPA [polyether-block-amides], making it one of the broadest TPE product portfolios in the industry,” he said.

RTP officials declined to provide any other details on the deal.

“Zeotherm TPV products offer continuous use performance at 150°C, while maintaining longtime exposure to engine oil and lubricant greases, PET officials said that PET can’t be achieved with other TPEs or copolyesters. Zeotherm TPV also bonds well to nylon substrates in overmolding applications, they added.”

“For design engineers with applications that require high performance in potentially harsh environments, such as under-the-hood automotive parts or harsh industrial applications, Zeotherm TPVs can be an excellent material choice," Gummersbach said.

Louisville, Ky.-based Zeon Chemicals is a global producer of specialty elastomers, polymers and specialty chemicals with annual sales of almost $3 billion.

The business operates 20 plants worldwide, making compounds based on more than 60 different engineering resin systems.
Traverse City, Mich. — Lon Offenbacher, president and CEO of Inteva Products LLC, is looking on the bright side as a Tier 1 supplier to a fluctuating, and increasingly high-tech, heavy automotive industry.

The top executive said successful navigation of the constant change comes down to knowing what people are buying, where they are buying it and what they need then and now.

“Innovation becomes a really big deal,” Offenbacher said in an Aug. 6 interview at the Center for Automotive Research’s Management Briefing Seminars. Ford, a $228 billion global auto supplier with headquarters in Troy, Mich., innovation is at the front end. The company makes closure systems, interior systems, and motor and electronics systems. Ford is also looking for the side-market material called Inteather, which highlights the evolution of that business into one that is more of a leather alternative in cut, sew and wrap applications for vehicle interior and exterior use.

The ‘in’ of Inteva stands for innovation, Offenbacher said. Though, he now refers to it as value-based innovation.

“A lot of times, companies will spend a lot of money and time on innovation, but if they don’t have a focus on fulfilling a need that the customer wants, if the customer understands it, then it doesn’t really pay off,” he said. Plastics News sat down with Offenbacher on Aug. 6 in Traverse City to discuss how the automotive supplier is staying competitive in the automotive interiors space.

Q: What will the future automotive lifestyle look like or have you essentially prepared for it?

Offenbacher: For our space, we’re in interiors. We’re in door systems business — they’re the new door systems — and electronic interiors. All three of those, while they’ll be changed, they won’t be gone. I think you’ve actually seen a lot of change in the interior segment over the last probably 10 or 15 years, getting a little more room-type of appearance.

By Audrey LaForest
Plastics News Staff

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By Richard Truett
Automotive News

Traverse City, Mich. — There is pressure to replace traditional steel, aluminum and plastics supplier industries.

Manufacturers of those vehicle material segments have argued that each has the potential to replace the others.

But during a panel discussion Aug. 6 at the 2019 Car Market Management Briefing Seminars, a trend took a more conciliatory tone than in previous years.

Each panel stated that a mixed-materials approach that uses the most appropriate material in strategic areas of a vehicle could allow car manufacturers to use plastics to produce safe, strong, lighter-weight vehicles that are cost-effective.

“By using the right material for the right job, you can make the transformation,” said Theo Schultes, director of engineering for plastics at GM. “There are definitely some areas where there is an advantage to be able to use certain materials at a lower weight and cost.”

But Schultes said the most important aspect is that the car must have a balanced and coordinated strategy.

“For its part, the steel industry has rebounded against aluminum’s strong push by developing new generations of ultra-high-strength steel that weigh less than the traditional grades compared with lighter materials,” said Paul S. Post, GM’s manager of Galvanizing and Technology, in Acceptance.

Plastics News staff reporter Audrey LaForest contributed to this report.

For full autonomy, these future vehicles will have sensors, lidar, radar and cameras — all of which create an opportunity for plastics.

Plastics, steel, aluminum coexist in auto, for now

By Richard Truett
Automotive News

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Powell: Mobility changing the way auto industry thinks about business

By Audrey LaForest
Plastics News Staff

Traverse City, Mich. — The automotive industry talks a lot about innovation and how the speed of change is accelerating, as automakers and suppliers race to adapt to the advanced technology enhanced through lighter materials.

That is cost-effective compared with traditional vehicle development and business models.

“Toyota, in our first hundred years, we were in cars,” Powell said at an interview at the Center for Automotive Research’s Management Briefing Seminars. “The next 100 years for Toyota are about mobility.”

Powell is vice president of the electronic systems division at Toyota Motor North America Research & Development. It’s a role that has him thinking new ways of adapting for driver assist systems, vehicle cockpit electronics and wiring systems — all areas that fall under the umbrella of safety.

And for Toyota’s automated driving strategies, specifically, safety is significant.

“Our sole focus is eliminating fatalities. That’s pretty much it,” he said. “And elimination of vehicle fatalities is the goal of the systems we’re developing today.”

Powell sat down with Plastics News to dig deeper into the biggest unknowns and challenges ranging from sensor integration to shuffling supply chains — adding a new mixture of stress and excitement for the key players in automotive.

Q: The technology on vehicles is changing drastically and rapidly. Each year, there seems to be an update, especially for advanced driver assistance systems. How is the speed of change altering the supply chain?

Powell: It’s a challenge. Traditional OEM/Tier I relationships have been around for a really long time. The Tier I is responsible for the total performance of whatever product they sell. In the Tier I’s case, we’re dealing with, which is heavily software dependent. The idea of the person who provides the system or the boxes also providing those systems is the default solution, but it may not be the most robust one.

We’re looking toward separations, software and hardware, so software is a product in itself. We’ll be bringing it in-house in certain areas, not every where. So, we will be owning our own software. We will be actually writing our own software, and we will be installing it in our suppliers’ partners’, boxes, so the business model is changing. They have to understand how to compete.

The successful Tier 1s, typically, were kind of big turnkey, highly capable, highly engineered products. That ecosystem may be changing. We’ll still be buying a lot of software and hardware traditionally, but as we evolve in this space, you’re going to see more new ways of commercially engaging the supply base, like how do you buy software? Do you buy licenses? Do you buy time and materials? Who owns it? Who’s responsible for validating it? Those are the big changes for the supply base.

They have to be evolving into “What do you want to be in this ecosystem?” Do you want to be a strong hardware player with low overhead? Do you want to be a full systems supplier? Do you want to be an ecosystem supplier?

It’s very complicated. We used to draw you the traditional relationship. Now the relationship, you can’t even draw it on a flat sheet of paper. It’s almost three-dimensional. It’s a big challenge for them. It’s a huge change for them because it’s a huge impact to their revenue stream.

What are some of the challenges of integrating sensors and electronics in vehicle exterior plastic systems? Most sensors are usually rely on plastic housings. Are you researching this and navigating within that space?

"Toyota, in our first hundred years, we were in cars. The next 100 years for Toyota are about mobility."
Wayne Powell
Toyota Motor Corp.

Powell: As in so many things in the automotive industry, it’s complicated, right? The idea of integrating incredibly expensive sensors. These are not 32 parts. Adding hundreds of dollars’ worth of electronics to integrate into the part, while it may make overall sense, what happens when one of them breaks or the performance we need? And is it priced in a way we can get it? Are people willing to pay for it? The hardest part is when we’re making changes like that, is customer perception following what we can do? Are we lagging or leading?

It’s often said that we’re lagging. Customers want more than we’re doing. And that’s generally not an untrue statement, but there’s sometimes where we can go too fast. We can introduce technologies and systems in the car that are too complicated. People don’t understand them. They don’t trust them. If you put a system in a car where the goal is to make it safer but the driver doesn’t trust it, it hasn’t done its job. The ability to predict how quickly people will adopt or come on board and say, “I trust my forward cameras to look at alter me. I trust these things are going to work and protect me.” The rate of adoption in the real marketplace — we’re not taking the niche marketplace, but the whole market — is really critical to us, and we pay a lot of attention to that.

Q: Do you find this era of automotive and new mobility stressful or energizing?
A: One of my biggest satisfying moments in the last year or so was an Elon Musk tweet. They were trying to launch the Model 3. He tweeted about how difficult it was and how complicated it was and how hard it is to meet production volume and get the cars out there and just talked about how hard their team members were working and how many late nights they were spending — and he’s absolutely correct.

Yes, that’s our world. That’s what we do. An automobile is a massively complicated system, and the idea that you can just get your arms around it and predict everything without incredible hard work, lots of stress, lots of changes in direction. That’s what we do. If we can’t live in uncertainty, automotive is not a good place to be. You have to be able to work in that somewhat scary space of sometimes pure brute force is what it takes to get it done. It’s just hard work. And what technologies, what systems, what things to do at the right time, and sometimes you bet right, and sometimes you bet wrong. And when you bet wrong, it’s a big deal, and you have to recover fast.

That uncertainty and stress and stress is kind of what we live for. This is our passion. Mobility is a twist on the passion, but it’s still the passion of what we do.

Plastics News, August 12, 2019

This last vehicle, a Lexus LS500h hybrid sedan, is one of about 20 vehicles on the road in North America tasked with a goal of getting valuable Toyota’s autonomous vehicle and driver assist systems for the future.

Plastics News photo by Audrey LaForest

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With easier-than-ever service and cleaning, you’ll immediately notice that Republic’s patented Split-A-Part modular shredder is the best choice for clean and service. And soon, you’ll discover that your operating costs are much lower, thanks to the way they minimize heat, wear and tear.
Since 2001, Plastics News has kicked off every year with our editorial agenda. Our one constant: Safety must be the top priority of every company. This year, we are glad to bring you our special report on workplace safety. A bunch of the stories are from a tremendous conference in mid-July, the Environmental Health and Safety Summit, sponsored by the Manufacturers Association for Plastics Processors (MAPP), the American Mold Builders Association and the Association for Rubber Products Manufacturers. This two-day event held in Columbus, Ohio, drew 100 people this year — but the conference deserves a much wider audience. The Environmental Health and Safety Summit is a unique chance for processors and mold makers to hear from processors and mold makers to hear the latest developments in safety. We encourage more people to attend this annual event.

Topics this year included safety around injection molding machines and tooling, how to survive an explosion inspection, medical marijuana, lockout/tag-out, the explosion hazards of combustible dusts, combustible dust control, dust explosion hazards, safety training, lockout/tag-out, explosion hazards, combustible dust control and combustible dusts.

And of course, lockout/tag-out — the OSHA rule that you have to totally power off a piece of industrial machinery before servicing the machine or doing maintenance. Failure to do lockout/tag-out of a machine, such as an injection molding press, can result in serious injury or even death. It’s absolutely critical. Although training is a must, so that all plant workers are on the same page.

Safety is about so much more than the big OSHA fine. If a worker gets seriously injured, physically, on the job — or heaven forbid, killed, as we reported this week about Larry Griffin Jr., who was electrocuted at DeKalb Molded Plastics — it also injures everybody else in the entire company — psychologically — from management down to the person sweeping the floors. Guilt. Remorse. What-if scenarios running in an endless loop through your mind.

An injury to one person can hurt morale of the entire company. For proof, read the Page 1 story about Kina Hart. She lost her left arm in a gruesome industrial accident when she was just 20 years old. She wasn’t properly trained for the summer job when she was a college student working in the Alaska salmon processing factory. The conveyor belt was not “locked out” as she cleaned the underside. Someone turned it to spray it down. She told about those huge feelings of guilt — by herself and her by her foreman at the fish plant, whose life was devastated by her injury on his watch. Hart’s story is heartbreaking and inspiring at the same time. She has made something good with her life, speaking at safety conferences and helping with safety training at factories.

Hart said her lost arm is an ugly reminder of that day. It often hurts for a minute can cause devastating stress — psychologically — from management down to the person sweeping the floors. Guilt. Remorse. “What-if scenarios” running in an endless loop through your mind.

Training and hazard awareness Training and hazard awareness was the top priority of every company.

Losing focus on safety doesn’t have to happen

**Perspective**

**NFPA 652: Beyond the Dust Hazard Analysis**

The plastics industry is replete with powders that, if dispersed in air, will form explosive dust clouds. These powders include the molding compounds, resins, ingredients and fillers used throughout the industry. The files of the Chemical Safety Board contain many plastics industry-related dust fires and explosions.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has developed detailed standards to help industry identify and manage the fire and explosion hazards of combustible dusts and particulate solids; the 2019 Edition of NFPA 652 is the most recently updated edition. Although it may be a fundamental high-level standard in some ways, it places clear obligations on the owner/operators of facilities that handle or process potentially combustible dusts.

NFPA 652 requires the owner/operator of a facility with potentially combustible dust to take responsibility for the following activities:• Determine the combustibility and explosibility hazards of materials they handle. • Identify and assess any fire, flash fire and explosion hazards, or Dust Hazard Analysis (DHA). • Manage the identified fire, flash fire, and explosion hazards. • Communicate the hazards to affected personnel. After a company has collected and analyzed the data, measured dusts for explosion properties in labs and undertaken a DHA at its facility, the requirements of the standard for procedures and training to “manage the identified hazards” — communicate the hazards” do not always receive sufficient attention. Here, we will review what you need to do after you have the explosion data and have completed your DHA.

Incidentally, the steps required under this heading of “management systems” below apply retroactively. You need to do it now, however long your facility has been operating.

Operating procedures and practices

It is important to have written operating procedures and practices that will prevent/mitigate dust explosions and fires. These written procedures should include maintenance and servicing as well as normal operation and need to be implemented by staff and contractors alike. Scheduled walk-throughs to validate practices and compliance are also very important.

Training and hazard awareness

Training and hazard awareness for staff and contractors become an important part of NFPA 652 requirements. The training level, frequency and depth will depend on the responsibilities and activities experienced of personnel; however, an operator who does not understand how a dust explosion can occur and why certain precautions are in place, could be at risk and could put others at risk.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping practices are important since powder layers not only produce large fires, they can also be disturbed and raised into a cloud form that is explosible. Such housekeeping practices must be verified periodically, through a documented audit.

Hot work

Clearly proper procedures for...
Carbon fiber truck bed ‘aggressive stance’ for GM

By Audrey LaForest
Plastics News Staff

Traverse City, Mich. — Gener-
al Motors Co. drew attention last year when it announced the op-
tion for a carbon fiber pickup box on the GMC Sierra.

The application of the high-cost, high-strength thermoplastic ma-
terial on the truck bed was a first for the automotive industry, which typically recites a “cost is king” mantra.

Mike Siwajek, vice president of research and development at Continental Structural Plastics Inc., the composites supplier that makes and manufactures the Car-
bonPro box at its facility in Hun-
tington, Ind., said that’s not going to be the case for every model.

“GM has taken an aggressive stance on this, but that’s something that brings value,” Siwajek said during an Aug. 6 session at the Center for Auto-
motive Research’s Management Brief-
ing Seminars. “It brings lightweight. It brings durability. And it’s a really, re-
ally fantastic proj-
ect.”

You have to de-
termine where car-
bon fiber, which car-
serves a price tag anywhere from $64-$60 per pound on average, pro-
vides the most value, he said.

“From our standpoint, you don’t want to go in and say, we’re just going to put carbon fiber there just for the sake of putting carbon fiber,” Siwajek added. “Yes, it saves weight. Yes, it’s high strength. … Where does it bring the most value for the customer?”

For GM, the strategic use of carbon fiber, plastics and other materials such as glass fiber composite on the Sierra enabled a mass savings of 62 pounds. It also eliminated the need for paint or a bed liner, which saved an additional 40 pounds of mass.

The CarbonPro box was a run-
ner-up in the module category for the 2019 Enlighten Award from global technology firm Altair En-
engineering Inc. The application marked a paradigm shift for carbon fiber composite use in the au-
tomotive industry and could open the door to wider adoption of the material in high-volume manufac-
turing of structural parts.

But when it comes to perfor-
ance, mass reduction and materi-
als — whether it’s steel, aluminum, plastics or attention-grabbing carbon fiber — Siwajek said au-
tomakers just “want solutions to their challenges,” and they want that solution to bring value and be cost-competitive.

“At the end of the day, I don’t know that anybody wants to pay for weight. They want value for performance,” he said. “So you try to figure out where it fits best, and it’s different from case to case.”

Continental Structural Plastics steps outside SMC comfort zone

By Audrey LaForest
Plastics News Staff

Traverse City, Mich. — Conti-
nental Structural Plastics Inc., a composite supplier owned by Japanese materials firm Tejin Ltd., wants to expand its portfo-
ilio beyond its molding comp-
ound.

CSP is looking at new materials and processes that can be mar-
pied with its current capacity and capabilities on a global scale, said Mike Siwajek, vice president of research and development at the company’s headquarters in Auburn Hills, Mich.

Plastics News caught up with Siwajek Aug. 7 at the 2019 CAR Management Briefing Seminars to discuss the automotive indus-
try’s influence on the big-picture business strategy.

Q: CSP has played a big role in materials and processes for au-
tomakers, most notably the car-
bon fiber truck bed as an option on the Sierra. Where do you expect to see more of this in the future?

Siwajek: I believe so. I think our new push is “driven by sci-
ence,” and it’s really kind of the philosophy we’ve always taken.

We’ve always been a “materials first” company, where we devel-
oped and then sell what we devel-
aposed as just trying to provide something everybody else provides. We try to provide some unique value.

But a lot of the things going on right now are developing for future programs and future ma-
terials, where we’re doing things a little bit differently for our customers. We’ve always been an SMC company. We’ve always done some B (thermoplastic), some E (thermoplastic-glass fiber), some G (glass fiber thermoplastic).

Now we have the CarbonPro box, where we’re actually getting into more tradition-
tional thermoplastic. We want to look to expand that because our charters may be if it’s $2 billion by 2030. We’re not going to get there with just SMC, so we’ve got to look at all different types of ma-
terials and solutions for our customers.

Q: And carbon fir-
ber, specifically, do you see that in automotive applica-
tions increasing or, because of cost, it’s not a feasible choice?

Siwajek: Carbon fiber is a high-val-
ue material, so you can’t just put carbon fiber somewhere to make it strong, make it light, because people aren’t always go-
ing to pay for that.

But if you can put it somewhere, where you’re going to get an extra-
value out of it, where you’re willing to pay a little more for the cost of that, is that something that you really see an expansion.

Now, the CarbonPro box is a little bit of a departure. I think that’s a brave chance GM is tak-
ing on this. It’s a spectacular part and material, and we’ll see how it takes off. And if it does, I think you’ll see more of that type of thing. But we’re also looking at, where else can we do carbon fiber? As an SMC company — and even the CarbonPro box is dis-
tinuous fibers — you’re cutting it up, which is reducing some of the inherent properties of carbon fiber. It still brings more than glass does, but can you look at doing continuous fibers, things that we don’t currently do? And those are some of the explorations we’re doing in the R&D side to see if we can use those kind of materials?

Q: The CarbonPro box is a pretty good example of differ-
ent materials coming together. There’s metal, aluminum, glass fiber composite and carbon fi-
ber. But overall, in automotive, to solve the problem.

Q: Carbon fiber, specifically, tends to generate a lot of hype. It’s one of the materials, at least by name, that automakers don’t shy away from talking about. But in terms of plastics — both the word and the variety of ma-
terials — does it have an image problem?

Siwajek: I don’t think it has an image problem. Carbon fiber inherently has the costs associ-
ated with it in people’s heads. If people say they’re using car-
bon fiber, it brings an image of high-quality, luxury vehicles. It’s historical. That’s where you always saw it. When you start seeing it creep down into more traditional passenger vehicles, I think that the customer percep-
tion is pretty high of carbon fiber — whether it be in plastic, ther-
moset or porcelain — what is that weight.

Q: CSP molds battery covers, too. Does the company see this as a growing area of importance as the industry gives more at-
tention to electric vehicles?

Siwajek: Yeah, that’s a growing market. There’s already a pret-
ty significant market in China, and we’re part of that market.

We mold a lot of battery covers in China. It’s part of our growth strategy in Europe as well be-
cause electrification is very im-
portant in Europe and Asia right now. The U.S. is a little bit standing back right now. They offer electric vehicles, but it’s not a strategy, so to speak, in our economy. But in Europe and Asia, it’s the way everybody’s going, so there are a lot more programs there. We’re getting our feet wet over there and learning the stan-
ards change daily because as they create these things, they realize, oh no, now we need this or we need that. That’s really the challenge for any team is to con-
tinually update the material and
Trade issues impacting business cycle

I t is the long-lost — or at least hid- den — business cycle in the U.S. economic data finally returning?

Some version of this question has vexed economists and market analysts and politicians for most of the past decade. Perhaps you have heard it expressed as, “Where are we in this cycle? Mid or late?”

To this day, there is a wide range of informed opinions on just where we are in the cycle, and I find it interesting that when these opinions are discussed they often require some knowledge of baseball in order to interpret them: “We are in the sixth — or third, or ninth, or even 10th — inning of this cycle.”

I have no doubt that most people in the plastics industry enjoy a good baseball reference. But understanding just where we are in the cycle is how owners and executives in this business earn their livings and pay their workers.

Nevertheless, the always-challenging task of analyzing and forecasting the business cycle has been more difficult than usual in recent years. The Great Recession resulted in a staggering disruption to the U.S. economy, and it has taken much longer than anyone ever expected to recover. There are still some segments that have not recovered, and all of this has put some big wrinkles in the cycle patterns. But I am starting to think that just maybe the classic cyclical pattern in the manufacturing data is re-emerging.

The chart shows the 12-month rate-of-change graphs derived from the monthly new orders data for both durable goods and nondurable goods in the United States. I chose to include both graphs for a couple of reasons. First, the plastics industry has a substantial interest in both sectors. Durable goods categories include important end markets such as automotive, appliances, medical, electronics, machinery and building materials. Nondurables includes the end markets for most plastic packaging products.

The second reason is that the cyclical patterns of these sectors have historically varied in predictable ways. For instance, the durable goods graph is usually more volatile. The conventional wisdom has always been that durable goods are more expensive than nondurables. Another difference is that some durables are purchased as investments, rather than for consumption, and their purchase often requires financing. Therefore, these markets are highly sensitive to changes in both incomes and interest rates. Thus, the rate-of-change graph should be higher at the peaks and deeper at the troughs. This is easily seen during the last recession in 2009 and the first year of the recovery in 2010.

Nondurables are mostly consumer staples: energy, food and clothing. These categories are usually less sensitive to changes in incomes and interest rates. But the conventional wisdom did not hold during the cyclical trough in 2015, when interest rates were extremely low. I could fill up a lot of pages describing how these two graphs and the whole U.S. economy failed to perform in the “usual” manner during the past 10 years, and I have no doubt this will be the subject of numerous books and case studies in the future.

But my immediate interest is the chart pattern of the past three or four years. Specifically, it is starting to look kind of “normal” again. To be sure, the latest cycle is longer and less volatile than most of the cycles of the past, but the pattern is unambiguously familiar. If this a return to normal, then the four letters on the chart mark the four major phases of the latest business cycle:

A — early recovery/expansion,
B — late recovery/expansion,
C — early consolidation/contraction,
D — late consolidation/contraction.

These areas are defined by the high and low points on the graph. Another important consideration is whether the graph is above or below the zero-line. If the graph is above the zero-line, it means that total new orders for the past 12 months have expanded when compared with the previous 12 months. A graph below the zero-line indicates that new orders in the most recent 12 months have contracted when compared with the same period of a year earlier.

It is worth noting that a cyclical peak need not get above the zero-line. And a cyclical trough need not fall below the zero-line. Most of the important end markets for plastics products are dominated by mature industries, and their cyclical patterns will mostly resemble that of the overall economy.

If we are returning to a more typical cyclical pattern, then the graph clearly indicates we are currently in a period of early consolidation or recession.

This means the actual monthly data is declining. In the second quarter of 2019, new orders of durable goods decreased 2 percent when compared with the same period of 2018. For the year-to-date total, the growth in orders for durable goods is still positive, but just barely. I expect the gradual decline to continue for the next few quarters. This will result in a decline in the annual total for new orders of durable goods in 2019 of -2.3 percent.

The pattern in the graph for nondurables is similar, but the actual numbers are not quite as negative. In the second quarter of this year, new orders of nondurables increased by less than 1 percent. For the year to date, orders of nondurables are up by less than 1 percent. The trajectory in this graph will continue to aim downward, and the annual decline this year will also be a modest 1 percent.

And whether you are a business manager in the plastics industry or a candidate for president of the United States, all of this begs the question, “Who will get the graph hit the next low point?”

My current prediction is the next trough in these graphs will occur in the first half of 2020, and the declines will be shallow. The low points for both graphs should stay above -5 percent. The U.S. is currently enjoying solid growth in consumer incomes and spending, and 2020 is an election year. These factors will buoy the new orders data.

The downward pressure on the data appears to be the result of recent foreign trade policy, and this could get much better — or much worse — in the coming year. Stay tuned.

NUMBERS THAT MATTER
WITH BILL WOOD

‘Numbers That Matter’ by Bill Wood appears in Plastics News twice monthly. It takes a close look at data and trends to help plastics company managers forecast next quarter and next year.
Hart
Continued from Page 1

Employee needs to think safety all day, every day. “But do we always do it? And ‘always’ really being the key word here. Because safety can’t be most of the time. We know that. Safety can’t be almost always. It really does require a 100 percent commitment,” Hart said. “I think it boils down to us. We are the people who make those day-to-day decisions that really dictate our own personal safety. And I think safety means something personal.”

Hart’s story
Hart knows just how personal safety really is. Attendees at the conference already knew how the story ended. She was wearing a prosthetic arm. She gets phantom pains common to amputees.

“To me, this is very ugly. It’s painful frequently. But the worst part of what happened to me was it was 100 percent preventable. I don’t even have to happen,” she said.

She graduated from high school in 1988, a year later drove to Alaska in a small vehicle for six days. The audience of her ‘80s-style, big-hair days as a cheerleader.

Her father was a logger in the forests of the Northwest; her mom stayed home to raise the kids. They told her cleaning near one of those two-inch rollers with a little green sponge. And that sponge kept getting pulled until it just literally broke. This time it was my entire arm. Literally just a second, that’s all it took. My arm went up and down the top of the conveyor belt.

Her goal of becoming a dentist was over, and for a while, she wallowed in self-pity. She got her degree and became a science teacher.

Hart feels lucky she got a second chance. “Every single day, I have a job that allows me to take some of the pain and not give up my safety,” she said.

She spreads her message: “I think the biggest thing that we try to make safety a very, very common thing. Why I think it’s very important is because I have 7.5 billion people on our planet. But that one impact all the time knowing that this, this is something personal.”
Know what OSHA wants before OSHA even arrives

By Bill Bregar
Plastics News Staff

Columbus, Ohio — Preparation and knowledge of your company’s past safety issues are important before the Occupational Safety and Health Administration shows up at your factory, Chris Whitehorne said at the Environmental Health and Safety Summit.

“Before you have OSHA knocking on your door, you want to be prepared in advance. Most importantly, know your risks and address them. I think everybody in this room knows the top three concerns that they have at their facility,” said Whitehorne, director of health and safety with U.S. Compliance, an environmental health and safety firm in Excelsior, Minn.

He said it’s a good idea to identify the top three to five concerns and work on fixing them. Whitehorne recommended knowing the company’s history with OSHA and checking the agency’s website, where you can search all factory locations and see any citations. Pay special attention to repeat violations.

“Have there been inspections in the past at your facility? Do you know what sites have had past violations? And most importantly, do you understand and make sure your facility has addressed them and responded to them correctly?” he asked.

Employee complaints are the most common trigger for an OSHA inspection, if OSHA determines work concerns are? Do they have complaints? If they’re voicing them, are you tracking them? Are you addressing them in a timely manner?

“Those are really critical items. A lot of times when we see these complaint inspections, what’s occurring is they’ve been brought up by the safety committee. They’ve been brought to the supervisor, and they’ve fallen on deaf ears. Nobody responds to them. Eventually they come to a point where they’re so frustrated — concerned, really — about their own health and safety — that they notify OSHA.”

Whitehorne said better communication is important: “The biggest thing you can do is make sure you have systems in place for employees to voice their concerns, and make sure you actively respond to them.”

Company safety officials also should check OSHA’s national and local emphasis programs. Right now, Whitehorne said there are nine national areas, including hazardous machinery and amputations. He said OSHA can look up your company’s SIC code, then come by for an inspection on those areas. That means companies should look at these areas in advance.

“Right now, Whitehorne said there are nine national areas, including hazardous machinery and amputations. He said OSHA can look up your company’s SIC code, then come by for an inspection on those areas. That means companies should check OSHA’s national and local emphasis programs.”

Whitehorne said, but don’t guess about them. Make sure important records are quickly available. And Whitehorne said company leaders should know why OSHA is on-site and bring the inspector to just the specific areas of concern — even if that means walking around the outside of the building to get to the warehouse to check out a complaint about forklift traffic there. You don’t need to go through the production area.

“Just be aware, even if OSHA comes on-site for an employee complaint, or an emphasis program, they can extend the scope if they see open and obvious safety concerns,” he said. Accompany the inspector at all times, take good notes and shoot the exact same photos the inspector does.

Fixing things right away, like a blocked fire extinguisher, can show good faith and may avoid a citation, he said. Make sure your key contact people have backups, or somebody is on vacation with OSHA arrives.

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Answer questions directly, Whitehorne said, but don’t guess at information or give estimates.

“You can provide that information later if they request it,” he said.

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Automation Plastics wins top firm in safety practices

By Bill Bregar
Plastics News Staff

Columbus, Ohio — Automation Plastics Corp. won first place. Second place went to Intertech Plastics Inc., and two companies tied for third: Currier Plastics Inc. and PolyFlex Products Inc.

Indianapolis-based MAPP announced the winners at the 2019 Environmental Health and Safety Summit in Columbus. MAPP members picked the winners from 25 entries.

Here is a recap of the winners:

• Automation Plastics of Aurora, Ohio, implemented a cultural change by improving the physical appearance of its plant and standardized systems and procedures. Employees on all levels share ideas for improvement, cleaning up spills and putting away tools and equipment. After the changes, the company reported that people see and report safety issues easier and accidents declined.

• Denver-based Intertech made improvements to forklift and pedestrian safety. The company added wirelessly monitored forklift impact sensors, collision-avoidance devices, LED warning spotlights and pedestrian walkways with guardrails.

The fleet of seven forklifts were upgraded with teleometry sensors that detect impacts and send operator performance reports so managers can reinforce safe operating behavior.

• Currier Plastics of Auburn, N.Y., reevaluated its safety systems in 2017 to make it a primary focus. Its new safety coordinator has experience as a firefighter, safety coordinator, maintenance and maintenance person. Currier also standardized safety behaviors by training employees and incident reporting. Each employee goes through a formal orientation that includes safety.

• Management gets out from behind desks and sees what the safety issues are at PolyFlex Prod- ucts of Farmington Hills, Mich.

One example is adding platforms for employees tasked with cleaning filters on hoppers, alter material handlers were seen standing on top of the injection side of the molding press. The company got material handling improvements in the problem-solving. PolyFlex also participated in a voluntary OSHA walk-through.

Safety summit speaker talks drugs, medical marijuana

By Bill Bregar
Plastics News Staff

Columbus, Ohio — An Ohio chemical dependency counselor had a message about medical marijuana for manufacturing officials at the Environmental Health and Safety Summit: “We are definitely headed into uncharted territory.”

In Ohio, you can’t smoke medical marijuana, but you can vape. And Ruth Bowdish said employees could be vaping in your factory right now, using either medical pot or recreational weed, and you won’t even know it.

“A lot of times when we think about marijuana, especially on the job, we associate it with that very strong and skunky odor. And when I do reasonable suspicion testing for employers, one of the things that I tell them to look for is that odor,” Bowdish said. “Well, sorry, guys, the game has changed because now the electronic or liquid marijuana, you can get it in a variety of flavors.”

The old days are over — both in today’s production line and much higher THC and the way it’s smoked.

“Instead, you really have to start paying more attention to behavior on the job and some of the physical signs and symptoms of marijuana. Because just the odor of it, if you see someone with a jacket, you kind of know that they’re using. If you see someone with an electronic cigarette, how are you going to know? That’s the problem,” she said.

Right now, Ohio law allows employers to ban all marijuana from the workplace, including medical, through company policy.

“Zero tolerance is really mean zero tolerance,” said Bowdish, whose counseling-practice is in Austin- town, Ohio. She recommends giving workers who test positive for drugs one second chance, instead of immediate firing.

However, medical marijuana rules vary from state to state, she said.

“And because this is a hot-button issue, things are changing,” Bowdish said.

The Environmental Health and Safety Summit, held July 17-18 in Columbus, was sponsored by the Manufacturers Association for Plastics Processors, the American Mold Builders Association and the Association for Ruber Products Manufacturers, all based in Indianapolis.

The drug epidemic is hitting the workplace.

“Seventy-five percent of habitual drug users are on the job. They’re not homeless, they’re not underneath the bridge, they’re coming to work every single day, and that’s according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,” Bowdish said.

She added that the Food and Drug Administration’s 1997 decision to allow drugmakers to advertise directly to consumers was a land- mark, but also that it has also contributed to the legal marijuana boom today.

As soon as we started seeing these advertisements, drug use, substance use, prescription drugs, it became the norm,” Bowdish said.

Today, seven out 10 Americans are taking some type of prescription drug, and an increase in advertising has made us apathetic to drug use.

Social media paved the way for us to hear about herbal remedies and supplements and also led to people self-diagnosing their illnesses.

“Marijuana is the most abused drug in America,” Bowdish said. “That shouldn’t be a shock to anybody. But look at No. 2. Prescriptions are the second-most abused drugs in America.”

Now there’s a pill for everything. Prescriptions shot up 85 percent from 1997 to 2016, she said. “That’s instant gratification.”

“All of these are contributing factors. And this is America right now. So it’s no wonder why we have people calling in for pills for the answer. That we’re looking at substances for the answer,” Bowdish said.

Regardless of your personal opinion of marijuana, there are still lots of unanswered questions when it comes to safety in the workplace, she said.

We don’t know enough about it. We don’t have the studies to back up how much it’s affecting us on the job. We don’t know how long it’s going to impact us. We don’t have that information. And so, without that information, we’re finding ourselves in problems.”

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WELCOME RECEPTION
SEPTEMBER 9, 2019
In Exhibit Hall
5:30pm - 7:00pm

NOVA CHEMICALS RECEPTION
SEPTEMBER 10, 2019
Vu Rooftop Bar
6:00pm - 8:00pm

See the full agenda online

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**SPECIAL REPORT: WORKPLACE SAFETY**

**Lockout/tag-out violations mean costly OSHA citations**

**By Bill Bregar**

Plastics News Staff

Columbus, Ohio — OSHA is hitting hard at the issue of lockout/tag-out and machine safety guarding and putting a laser focus on amputations that could result from failure to disconnect all energy before servicing and maintenance of industrial machines.

That was the message from two lawyers who spoke at the Environmental Health and Safety Summit.

“When do most amputations occur? When someone forgot to lockout/tag-out and when there’s a lack of a guard. That’s when you’re going to see an amputation,” said Nelva Smith, of the Steptoe & Johnson law firm.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration revised its reporting rule on Jan. 1, 2015, so employers now must report within 24 hours any amputation injury, even if there is no loss of bone, as well as eye injuries and all in-patient hospitalizations. OSHA kept its ongoing rule that fatalities must be reported within eight hours.

Smith said OSHA is increasing fines every year for amputations.

“Now you can go up to $139,000 for a maximum for a willful and a repeat [violations],” she said. “So you can easily get one citation for $139,000. Imagine if you got five citations? How much is that? Over a half million dollars. And again, there’s a pattern. They’re really hitting the lockout/tag-out and machine-guarding.”

Plastics machinery, such as injection molding machinery, can cause serious injuries from pinching and crushing, especially in the mold clamping area.

“It’s to prevent serious injury or death. You should be aware of the standard and what your requirements are under the standard,” Smith said.

OSHA defines “amputation” broadly and is stricter than workers’ compensation, according to William Wahoff, a lawyer at the firm. “If it is the tip of the finger with no bone damaged, you still have to report it for OSHA.”

And Wahoff said amputations are likely to lead to OSHA inspections: 65 percent of reported amputations resulted in inspections, compared with in-patient hospitalizations, which lead to inspections in around 35-40 percent of the cases.

Smith and Wahoff gave an hour-long presentation about lockout/tag-out and machine guarding during the health and safety conference, held July 18-19 in Columbus. Both lawyers are based in Columbus.

OSHA uses the term “control of hazardous energy,” for what’s commonly called lockout/tagout. Smith said, covering sources of energy such as electrical, mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic, chemical and thermal.

“Why do we need to do it? Because during the servicing and maintenance of these machines and equipment, that’s where the injuries do occur, more often than not,” Smith said. “The unexpected startup or release of stored energy will usually result in a serious injury or death. Usually these are very complicated big machines, with a lot of working parts, a lot of sharp edges and pinch-points and that sort of thing. And if you’ve got a maintenance person working on a machine and a fellow employee doesn’t know it’s not locked out and just says, ‘Oh, I’m gonna hit the lock out and just says, ‘Oh, I’m gonna hit the lockout/tag-out, and it’s not covered by lockout/tag-out. It’s not covered by lockout/tag-out.”

Smith and Wahoff said manufacturers must have an energy control program and specific procedures for each machine. They recommend posting the step-by-step procedure for lockout/tag-out right on the machine, making it visible for employees and OSHA inspectors.

OSHA will ask about the hazardous energy policy, even if they are not cited for another type of complaint, the lawyers said.

Wahoff said that companies train plant employees and maintenance staff; they should use OSHA’s hazardous energy control terminology at least part of the time, so they know the right wording when an inspector questions the workers.

Smith added that the person who puts the lock tag on the machine must be the one who takes it off when the work is completed.

What about during “normal production”? Smith said that is not covered by lockout/tag-out.

“The problem we run into is, can we argue certain things are normal and you don’t have to have lockout/tag-out, because it can be a very complicated procedure to disconnect all of the sources of energy,” she said. Minor tool changes and adjustments and other minor servicing activities are OK, “if it’s routine, it’s repetitive and integral to the core of the machine, and you use alternative measures to protect that employee,” Smith said.

But Wahoff said OSHA does not consider the setup of dies to be “normal operation.”

Smith laid out the way to think about it: “If you want to make an exception to the lockout/tag-out procedure, am I putting an employee in a zone of danger? Are they having to put themselves in a machine? Are we having to bypass a guard? Is that really ‘normal production’?”

**APPLICATION OF LOCKOUT/TAG-OUT STANDARD**

- OSHA does not consider “setup” of dies “normal operation.”
- When dies are being set up, OSHA will expect the machine to be locked out.
- While the employer may argue that die setup is not servicing or maintenance of equipment, OSHA will take the position that setting up equipment, with the exception of the short time needed to “jog” the equipment to check if it works properly, presents a hazard of amputation and other hazards to the degree that lockout is required.

**LOCKOUT/TAG-OUT GENERAL INDUSTRY**

- Ensure that lockout/tag-out devices identify the individual users.
- Policy that permits only the employee who applied a lockout/tag-out device to remove it.
- Inspect procedures annually.
- Provide training for all employees covered by the standard.

**OSHA looking at new technology for lockout/tag-out**

**By Bill Bregar**

Plastics News Staff

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is considering whether to update its lockout/tag-out standard to modernize it without compromising worker safety during the servicing and maintenance of machines.

OSHA first adopted the standard in 1989. Lockout/tag-out, which OSHA also calls “the control of hazardous energy,” currently requires the energy sources to be controlled using energy isolating devices (EID). Circuit control-type devices were specifically excluded from the standard.

“Nevertheless, OSHA recognizes that there have been safety advancements to control circuit-type devices since OSHA adopted the standard in 1989,” the agency said in its explanation. “Accordingly, OSHA is revisiting the lockout/tag-out standard to consider whether the use of control circuit-type devices instead of EIDs for some tasks or under certain conditions.”

OSHA said, “Over the years, some employers have stated that they believe that control circuit-type devices that use approved components, redundant systems, and control-reliable circuitry are as safe as EIDs.” They could lead to less downtime, the agency said.

Washington-based OSHA, part of the U.S. Department of Labor, is seeking comments, information and data to determine which conditions, if any, circuit control-type devices could be used.

OSHA also is considering changes to lockout/tag-out rules for robots “that would reflect new industry best practices and technological advances for hazardous energy control in the robotics industry,” the agency said. Part of the reason is the advent of collaborative robots, or “cobots,” that work alongside human employees.

The Plastics Industry Association is preparing comments to meet the agency’s Aug. 19 deadline. The Washington-based trade group issued a statement encouraging plastics processors to give OSHA their input, as lockout/tag-out primarily impacts the users of plastics machinery — rather than just machine manufacturers.

“Safety is paramount for the U.S. plastics industry — for the thousands of companies it consists of and the hundreds of thousands of workers who make it what it is. [The Plastics Industry Association] supports a most-rigorous regulatory standard that allows the use of effective technological advancements to control hazardous energy, and is eager to assist OSHA now and in future rule-making,” the trade association said in the prepared statement.
Columbia Gas settles with explosion victims for $143M

By Catherine Kavanagh  
Plastics News Staff

Columbia Gas of Massachusetts and its parent company, NiSource Inc., will pay $143 million to settle all class-action lawsuits stemming from damages related to gas explosions that rocked three cities and set off fires last year.

The deadly incident happened Sept. 13, 2018, during a project to upgrade century-old cast iron pipes with high density polyethylene pipes.

Because of a contractor error involving a sensor line, high-pressure natural gas was released into the low-pressure gas distribution system, causing widespread damage to nearby housing while Columbia Gas was granted a settlement fund to help home and business owners who did not suffer physical harm but were displaced or significantly affected by fire and damage to homes, furnaces, ranges and dryers. At its peak, more than 8,000 people in 2,200 families relocated to 4,000 hotel rooms, 160 apartments and about 200 RVs.

The disaster left thousands of homes and businesses without gas heat or hot water, some for months. People used temporary housing while Columbia Gas replaced pipeline damaged by the disaster.

In all, NiSource has set aside $1 billion to address the high-pressure HDPE mains with replaced pipeline damaged by gas-fueled appliances.

A teenager result of structure/f_i_res ignited by gas explosions that rocked three communities last September, Andover and North Andover, and Lawrence, which destroyed 117 structures were damaged in Lawrence, killing a Boston area resident in 2018.

An aerial view of the house where a chimney collapsed onto a vehicle, killing a Boston area resident in 2018. National Transportation Safety Board photo

The National Transportation Safety Board continues to investigate the incident. Its preliminary report says a Columbia Gas contractor deactivated a cast iron main installed in the early 1900s without realizing the pressure sensors were still active. The system sensed pressure was falling and allowed the full flow of gas into the lines. There were no relief valves to relieve the overpressurization, and gas streamed into buildings.

“As a result, natural gas was delivered to customers at a pressure well above the maximum allowable operating pressure, which led to the ignition of fires and explosions in homes,” the report says.

NTSB also discovered that Columbia Gas omitted steps in its project workflow process that could have prevented “the error that led to the accident.” The engineering plans used for the job didn’t document the location of regulator-sensing lines in the natural gas distribution pipes that were slated to be abandoned.

As the system is updated with HDPE pipe, the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities is providing oversight of the installation to ensure that all work complies with state and federal safety regulations.

Mark McDonald, president of NatGas Consulting in Boston, a firm that offers independent assessments and witness services for natural gas, propane and carbon monoxide incidents, said all parties need to recognize generally accepted good engineering practices.

“In my opinion the big lessons are to ensure gas companies do their due diligence on replacement programs, as well as have the correct professionals on site when working in close proximity to critical infrastructure such as district regulator stations,” McDonald said in an email.

A 2.1 million-mile system of distribution and service pipelines deliver huge volumes of natural gas to U.S. customers, and much of it is archaic in places like New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. PE pipe is a popular replacement product because it is lightweight and resists corrosion, chemicals and abrasion; and is easy to install by using heat fusions or mechanical fittings.

If the Columbia Gas system had already been converted to HDPE pipe, overpressurization still probably would have occurred because it appears the failure points were at the end user’s equipment designed for low-pressure gas, McDonald said.

However, the damage and outage time would have likely been limited, he added.

“The infrastructure was plastic as opposed to cast iron, the outage would have likely been only days as opposed to months,” McDonald said. “Cast iron is only designed for lower-pressure use. Plastic can be used for all distribution pressure.”

The over-pressurization of the cast iron pipe “compromised” miles of the system and it took more than three months to replace the damaged areas, McDonald said.

McDonald was retained by more than six law firms representing the deceased victim, injured victims and those that suffered property losses. He said he believes Columbia Gas has taken complete responsibility in terms of paying compensation at the outset.

“We will need to hold Columbia Gas responsible for this man-made disaster and act to learn from these mistakes, I do believe Columbia Gas responded more than appropriately in this case in terms of timely compensation for those affected to help heal the wounds created, in a very timely fashion,” McDonald said.

The $1 billion set aside for settlement is to also help reimburse the three cities for curb-to-curb repairs of roadways and sidewalks, as well as homes and businesses needing 18,500 new appliances.

“After what happened last September was tragic, and we will always be mindful of its impact on our customers and everyone in the communities we serve, including those represented by this settlement,” NiSource Inc. CEO and president of NiSource, said in a July 28 statement. “Today marks another important step forward, as we continue to fulfill our commitment to residents and businesses.”

SACMI IMOLA S.C. — The machinery maker in Imola, Italy, named Giulio Mengoli general manager.

SRG GLOBAL INC. — The manufacturers of chrome-plating machine parts in Troy, Mich., named Merritt Gaunt president.

SUN PLASTICHE INC. — The purging compound manufacturer in Paripampa, N.Y., named Phani Nagaraj vice president.

SUFRIDER FOUNDATION — The San Clemente, Calif., nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of clean water and healthy beachfases named Jennie Romer a legal associate for its Ocean’s Plastic Pollution Initiative. Founder of PlasticBagLaws.org, Romer has previously led coalitions in support of plastic bag legislation in California and New York.

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Silgan execs say plastics unit well positioned for growth

By Jim Johnson
Plastics News Staff

Years of work restructuring its plastics container business is paying off for Silgan Holdings Inc. as that part of the company is now on solid footing and looking to expand.

“We think the business is well positioned for further growth. We’ve got the operational cost platform where we wanted it to be. The business is at a profit level that allows us to continue to invest to grow the business,” Chief Operating Officer Adam Allott said.

Silgan makes both metal and plastic containers as well as closures. A focus for the company in recent years has been a reorganization of its plastics container business, including the closure of locations, new facility construction and the wringing out of millions of dollars in annual costs.

The result, Silgan said on a conference call to discuss second quarter earnings, is a business that can expect expansion.

“A 3 percent growth rate for the plastics business is definitely attainable. We had posted really good growth last year as we were recovering and putting volume back into our system. So there’s still opportunity here. As we said all along, we don’t think anybody is winning around the use of bioplastics or recycled plastic containers for items, such as shelf-stable foods and personal care products, for the bulk of its business.

“The increased focus on plastics has Silgan talking more with customers in terms of sustainability, but those conversations center around the use of bioplastics or recycled resins, not the elimination of plastics.

“The conversations have increased. I think awareness is greater, but I think no fundamental change,” Greenlee said.

While growth is expected, the company also told stock analysts on the call that the improvements might ebb and flow.

“We said all along, the growth in plastics is going to be a little lumpy for us. Looking at it by quarter, it’s difficult at times,” Greenlee said.

He pointed to last year’s results that saw 4 percent growth and indicated those results make it challenging to continue growth at that pace.

With single-use plastics increasingly under attack, Silgan said its plastics business is essentially not exposed to that portion of the business. Only about 2 percent of Silgan’s plastics container business is in the single-serve beverage market.

“That’s not a huge business for us,” Allott said.

Silgan, instead, relies on multibusinesses to multiuse plastic containers for items, such as shelf-stable foods and personal care products.

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Nelipak

Continued from Page 1

“Not too long ago, there were two major public companies in both food and medical packaging: Amcor and Bemis,” said Schmitt, managing director of Montesino Associates LLC in Wilmington, Del. “Indeed, they split the assets of Alcan when Alcan’s packaging division was divested. Now they are merging.”

Bemis and Amcor grew significantly when they split the former Alcan Packaging business in 2010, which had been owned by metals and mining firm Rio Tinto plc.

But when Bemis and Amcor agreed to merge, competition authorities in the United States and Europe asked the two to divest big chunks of their medical packaging business — and private equity firms pounced on the opportunity.

First, Wayne, Pa.-based Tekni-Plex Inc., which is owned by Tenet Capital, bought three manufacturing plants from Amcor’s Flexible Packaging business unit for $215 million to broaden its portfolio of sterilizable medical device packaging. The deal included three U.S. plants.

Now Kohlberg-backed Nelipak has done the same with three Bemis plants in Europe.

Schmitt said the private equity firms are building a portfolio of packaging companies focused only on medical devices or health care, not food.

“The question is, will Amcor be able to focus on both food and medical, and use its size and brand strength to grow its position? Or will this new map of strong and growing sterile medical packaging companies led by private equity challenge Amcor in the medical arena?”

“Additional consolidation appears to be likely. Add that the uncertainty of both trade wars and a possible recession and we will see some interesting moves in the future,” Schmitt said.

Nelipak by the numbers

Prior to the merger, Nelipak, which has been in business for 60 years, owned more than 800 at seven production sites. In addition to its headquarters in Cranston, R.I., the company had Bemis plants in Whitehall, Pa.; Phoenix; Humacao, Puerto Rico; San José, Costa Rica; Galway, Ireland; and Venray, the Netherlands.

With an estimated $90 million in sales, Nelipak Healthcare Packaging ranked No. 25 among North American thermoformers, according to the latest Plastics News ranking.

The Bemis Healthcare deal adds three more plants and 600 employees. The three plants, in Londonderry, Northern Ireland; Clara, Ireland; and Brigg, England, represented the entire Bemis Healthcare Packaging in the U.S. as the EV market

“we’re looking every day at expansion in Europe to be closer to the customer and provide service there. We’ve always had some business with the European OEMs, but we’re really trying to expand that and build relationships there.”

Mike Siwajek
Continental Structural Plastics Inc.
Rodon Group sees window of opportunity with new product line

By Audrey LaForest
Plastics News Staff

Rodon Group LLC, a custom injection molder out of Hatfield, Pa., is setting its sights on a new product line that it says could have a significant impact on sales and profitability for the company in the years to come.

The product, called SillDry, is a patented one-piece sill pan flashing that is designed to protect vulnerable areas of windows and doors from water intrusion. The expandable, waterproof design has a raised back dam with a built-in slope and features an accordion-style expansion capability.

The part is made of thermoplastic polyolefin and can be molded in a cycle time of 30-60 seconds depending on the size, which can range from “18 inches to infinity,” according to co-inventor Joel Glickman. The largest size so far has been 12 feet, he said.

“Most recently, the company invested around $750,000 in a 720-ton injection mold that is being used to mold the large SillDry parts. The Nissel press is equipped with a high-speed, full-servo robot from Star Automation Inc.”

The machine is Rodon’s largest-est-tonnage press to date and joins 118 other injection molding machines housed at the company’s 125,000-square-foot headquarters and manufacturing facility. Clamping forces now range from 46,720 tons.

The company has also purchased another 125,000-square-foot building about a mile from its headquarters. The building — a mirror image of the current facility — is valued at about $9 million, Glickman said, and has 11 loading docks. It’ll be up and running with in the next week or two, and it will employ about 10 people.

“While we do have the second building for our warehouse and shipping and use the space that we’ve cleared out — the warehouse in the original building — to add additional presses,” Glickman said. “That’s our plan. All of the molding will still be done at its headquarters while it runs out of room. When that happens, he estimated the second facility could house between 35-50 injection molding machines.

And with SillDry, the company is expecting “big things,” Glickman said.

“I think it will be significant in that there are 60 million windows and doors made in the United States,” he said. “Rather than selling something for a nickel, the sill pans that we’re selling, the ballpark range is somewhere between $8 and $10 a running foot.”

A typical 34-foot unit could be in the mid-$20 range for a part, he estimated.

“Multiply that by 60 million, you see what the potential of the company is,” he said.

Rodon Group is No. 160 on Plastics News’ most recent ranking of injection molders in North America, with estimated injection molding sales of $40 million in 2018.

CPI adds cooling tower production site for Tower Tech

By Frank Esposito
Plastics News Staff

Creative Pultrusions Inc., a maker of fiber-reinforced polymer products, has added a building on its campus to include its Tower Tech cooling tower business.

A grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new building is set for Aug. 13 in Alum Bank, Pa. Guided tours at the event will showcase the manufacturing process of the Tower Tech cooling towers, company officials said in a news release.

CPI, which acquired Tower Tech in 2012, makes the walls for the cooling towers, and company officials said centralizing manufacturing improves efficiency and saves cost on freight.

Local contractor Corle Construction built the 36,000-square-foot facility. The expansion on the CPI campus created 20 additional jobs. CPI currently staffs 180 employees, and officials said that job growth is projected to continue.

“Having our new facility near our major suppliers allows us to serve our ever-growing customer base,” CEO Shane Weyant said in a news release. “Beaver County and the surrounding areas have been good to Creative Pultrusions, so we are excited to add additional employment opportunities to the immediate area.

Tower Tech President Mathu Solo added that the new building allows his firm to have its core manufacturing and assembly in the same place for the first time in its 35-year history. “This grand opening is the beginning of many exciting product improvements, offerings and growth for Tower Tech going forward,” he said.

After being acquired by PCI, Tower Tech moved its production from Oklahoma City to Pennsylvania. CPI has designed and produced standard and custom fiberglass profile shapes such as I-beams, tubes, rods and sheets, as well as bridges, boardwalks and panels, since 1973. Late last year, CPI acquired composite parts maker Composite Advantages LLC of Dayton, Ohio. The CA deal was CPI’s fourth acquisition since 2016.
PTI study focuses on preforms, humidity

By Jim Johnson
Plastics News Staff

Time is not just the enemy of mankind as new research shows older PET preforms are more difficult to process into new containers.

The work by Plastic Technolo-
gies Inc. of Holland, Ohio, looks at preforms for both 20-ounce and 2-liter bottles stored for more than a year.

The bottom line is that PET preforms, because they absorb moisture while being stored, cre-

ate more problems as time pass, the research and development firm said.

New preforms have close to 0 parts per million of moisture, but preforms stored over time or in what PTI calls "extremely humid conditions" can contain up to 10,000 ppm of moisture, PTI said in a new white paper examining the issue.

PTI studied preforms with 3,000 ppm, which is typical in preforms that are stored from three to six months in moderate humidity conditions.

"Our plant support personnel were frequently asked what storage duration was acceptable for preforms and what problems can present themselves during longer storage periods," Sumit Mukherjee, PTI chief technology officer, said in a statement.

The company's goal was to lower the moisture level to 200 ppm with "reasonable temperature to minimize preform dimensional deformation" using vacuum oven drying.

Research found that this approach takes about 50 days to lower the moisture content using 22°C (71.6°F) for the first 15 days and then increasing to 60°C (140°F). That's not a viable time frame, PTI said.

There also is not equipment available to dry large quantities of preforms in a vacuum oven simultaneously. Using tempe-

ratures higher than 40°C also might deform preforms that would then cause blow molding problems.

PTI undertook the research after frequently receiving ques-
tions about how long preforms can be stored.

"The older the preform, the more difficult it will be to pro-

cess so that the container meets performance criteria," PTI said in its white paper. "The time of year the preforms were injection molded, along with the environ-

mental conditions in which they are kept, also will impact perfor-

mance." PTI said, "acts as a plasticizer allowing for more stretching and less strain hardening." The added moisture also allows preforms to absorb more heat during pro-

cessing.

The work also found that larg-
deriameter preforms are im-

pacted more by moisture than smaller-diameter units.

PTI's white paper, "Preforms: what you need to know about storage time/conditions," is available at https://s27935.pcdn.
mental-Conditions-on-Lvatent-Hard-
ied-Preforms-06.28.2019.pdf.

Dunkin’ to switch to PP for lids by 2020

By Jim Johnson
Plastics News Staff

The middle of 2020 is an important time for fast-food restaurant Dunkin’ as two ef-

forts directly impact the company’s use of plastics expect to be fully rolled out.

The Canton, Mass.-based company, which recently dropped the “Donuts” from its name, is out with a new plan to transition from polystyrene to polypropylene lids by mid-2020.

That’s the same time frame for finaliza-
tion of the company’s switch from expand-
ed PS cups to double-walled paper cups for hot drinks in the United States.

The EPS cup had long been an iconic part of the Dunkin’ experience but the company signaled a few years ago that it wanted to move away from that material due to recy-

cling concerns.

That’s the same rationale Dunkin’ is citing for replacing PS lids with PP lids.

Double-walled paper cups already are in many markets around the country as the company continues to roll out their use. Along the way the company also tested use of expanded polypropylene cups but ulti-

mately opted for paper.

“The addition to paper cups will remove 1 billion foam cups from the waste stream annually,” said Karen Raskopf, chief com-

munications and sustainability officer in the company’s newly released sustainability report.

EPS has come under increased scrutiny, especially in the foodservice sector, be-

cause of the relative difficulty to recycle the material, compared with our resins and substrates.

PP has emerged in recent years in popu-

larity, and the overall trend in the recycling markets is to capture more and more of that material. PP still has a long way to go to meet the recycling tonnage posted by both PET and high density polyethylene.

"For plastic, increasing the recyclabi-

lity and reducing our consumption is a top priority. We remain committed to finding a long-term sustainable alternative to our sin-

gle-use plastic packaging, including straws, that meets our guests’ expectations and re-
duces environmental impacts," the compa-

ny said in the report.

International locations also are transition-
ing to paper cups, Dunkin’ said.

"The majority of Dunkin’s international markets are currently using paper cups, and we will work with our franchisees/licensees to eliminate any remaining foam cups by our 2020 goal," the report said.

The change from EPS to paper cups elimi-
nates the use of 19 million pounds of PS, the company said.

While Dunkin’ is positioning its move to PP lids as part of a sustainability push, a group called The Last Beach Cleanup ex-

pressed concerns.

by Dell, an independent engineer with the environmental group, raised questions about the availability of PP recycling in communities and whether there is enough interest from material recovery facilities to handle them.

"While Dunkin' may not have another ma-

terial ready for use as lids yet, they should not perpetuate the myth that the PP... lids are 'recyclable,' she said in a statement.

Performance Pipe earns safety star status from OSHA

By Catherine Kavanagh
Plastics News Staff

Performance Pipe’s manufacturing op-
eration in Plano, Texas, earned a Star designation from the U.S. Depart-
ment of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for operating 13 years without a recordable injury.

The recognition follows participation in OSHA’s voluntary protection program (VPP), which was started in 1982 to en-
courage safe and healthy working condi-

tions.

With sales of $450 million, Performance Pipe ranks No. 9 among North American pipe, profile and tubing extruders, accord-
ing to Plastics News’ latest ranking.

Between its manufacturing and admin-

istrative facilities, Performance Pipe far-

outperforms national averages for the pipe-fitting sector when it comes to RIR, Bureau of Labor Statistics data show.

The honors for the Plano operation build on Chevron Phillips’ initiative called "Our Journey to Zero" to maintain top safety results, according to Kate Hol-

zkauser, the company’s vice president of environment, health and security.

"Thanks to them, we are now one of a handful of U.S. private employers with all eligible sites VPP Star certified," Holzau-

sPLAYER said in a news release. "This remark-

able achievement reflects our relentless focus on safety performance and reforc-
ed elements of one of the main goals of our operational excellence strategy: Eliminate high-sev-

dity/high-potential process and personnel safety events."

Companies trying for the Star status must exceed minimum OSHA standards and continue to develop improvement programs.

"As a VPP Star Site, our Plano office has undergone a transformational effort to engage employees through diverse safety tools that raise general safety awareness," Mike Zeglin, Performance Pipe general manager and president, said in the release. "I could not be prouder of their hard work and enthusiasm to reach this outstanding goal to keep our people, contractors and neighboring community safe."
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**Resin Pricing Chart**

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Prices are in U.S. cents per pound for prime resin, unfilled, natural color, FOB supplier, unless otherwise noted. Prices are generated from interviews with buyers and suppliers. The information provided is based on sources believed to be reliable, but its accuracy or timeliness is not guaranteed and no warranties of any kind are provided. *Plastics News* does not intend to specify the price of the materials listed. For price quotes on specific materials, contact the supplier. *PN* discourages use of this chart as a single-source index for price contracts. *PN* does not buy or sell resins.

*Plastics News* resin pricing for thermosets, certain engineering thermoplastics and high-temperature thermoplastics are published in the last issue of each month. Data can be viewed anytime online at www.plasticsnews.com. Paying *PN* subscribers also can access historical resin pricing data and graphs from our website.

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### Commodity Thermoplastics

**Key:**
- I: Annual volumes greater than 20 million pounds
- II: Annual volumes of about 2 million to 5 million pounds

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For pricing information on virgin thermoplastic or thermoset resins, call Frank Esposito at 330-703-7290.

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**Resin/Grade**

**Volume category I**

**Volume category II**

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**Gas & oil futures**

Average prices in U.S. dollars*

**Natural gas**

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**Crude oil**

*As of August 8

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Updates:
- An arrow, up or down, indicates a market price change in that direction from the previous week.
- A “P” indicates that a price change for that material is pending.
- A bullet indicates a correction in the published price.

Highlights:
- Solid polystyrene up 2 cents.
- Polypropylene up 1 cent.
- PET bottle resin up 1 cent.
Regloplas touts pressurized water benefits in heating, cooling

By Bill Bregar
Plastics News Staff

Officials of Swiss mold temperature-control maker Regloplas AG and its U.S. operation, Regloplas Corp. in St. Joseph, Mich., say pressurized water is the best method for rapid heating and cooling of injection molds, as well as tooling for composites for aerospace parts.

The advantages of rapid heating and cooling of a mold are becoming more well known in North America. They include improved part surface quality and mechanical properties and reduction of mold stresses that can cause warpage.

Regloplas claims pressurized water is more effective than oil, steam and electric cartridge heaters for rapid heating and cooling. Benefits include less injection pressure and clamping force required, longer holding pressure even in areas away from the gate, energy efficiency gains and the possibility of homogeneous cooling and fewer scrap parts. It can reduce cycle times.

Markets for Regloplas’ Variotherm temperature-control products include injection molding, composites/aerospace, automotive, medical, compounders, food processing, die-casting and tire and rubber.

The top-line Regloplas P230S pressurized water temperature-control unit, introduced at NPE2018, can heat pressurized water up to 446°F. Because the water is under high pressure, it remains liquid and does not turn to steam, Brian Pruit, sales manager for plastics and medical North America, said.

The P230S offers high-capacity pumping of 10 gallons per minute, with precise pressure control. The multiflow unit distributes pressurized water to the mold. One multiflow can run four different water flows in parallel, each running a different temperature, for specific areas of the mold, Pruit said.

Each circuit is set and monitored separately, fully integrated with the control system. The technician can set the monitoring window according to the specified target values. If the temperature or flow rate goes outside the respective window, the system will trigger an alarm.

Regloplas officials outlined issues with some competing methods. Steam has limited precision on temperature control and requires separate cooling channels that need cold water. Also, a line break can cause potential steam injuries.

Oil can use the same channel to heat and cool, but the rate of heating can be slow. Also, energy use is increased because of the oil viscosity. Regloplas officials said oil can be a problem in clean rooms for medical molding. Electric cartridge heaters consume large amounts of electricity and do not offer cooling.

The heating elements can fail. The mold is the key to the company said. The goal is the ability to make very quick temperature changes on the mold cavity surface.

Rapid cycle molding can be retimed and applied to any existing mold, if the tool is properly sized and designed. Using conformal inserts where the mold channels follow the contours of the part can direct rapid heating and cooling to problem areas, like a thin wall section. Or in the product design phase, a conformal mold could be configured right from the start for Regloplas technology.

Mold weight should be as light as possible and have good thermal characteristics. Channels should be as close to the surface as possible.

On tooling to make glass-fibered composite parts, Regloplas claims its system delivers better strength and structure since it endures a more homogeneous orientation of glass fibers. It also reduces weld lines and warpage, and it improves dimensional stability and consistency of injection molded parts, the company said.

Regloplas manufactures the equipment at its headquarters in the Canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland. The family-owned company employs 90 in Switzerland and more than 200 worldwide.
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