

E 4870 E



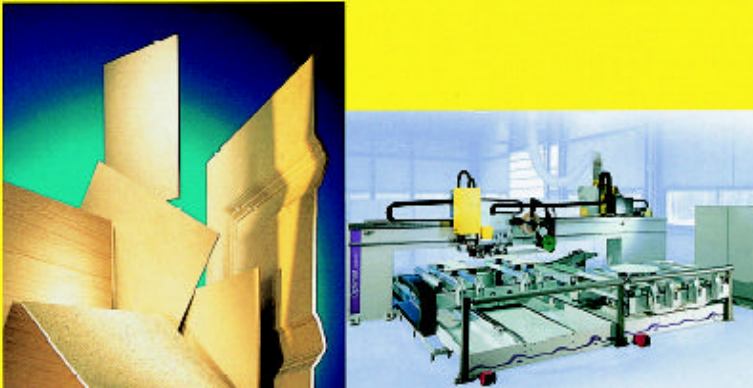
9/02

Holz- und Kunststoffverarbeitung
Woodworking and Furniture Industries

Translated offprint

“Unlimited thinking – that’s what we need”

DSM Melamine



Unlimited thinking – that’s what we need

“It is all very complicated” – the former Austrian chancellor Fred Sinowatz once said to the media when he had to explain complicated relationships. Leon P.M. Halders, Vice-President Marketing & Sales at DSM Melamine in Sittard, the Netherlands, used other words when he was speaking at the European Laminates Conference In Vienna in April 2002, about the need to draw on one’s reserves for successful global operation:

Leon P.M. Halders: to capitalize on the sustainable character of the wood-based panel industry

“If you don’t make a profit, the banks will stop giving you money. If you don’t care about the people in your company, you will soon have no people left, and if you don’t care about the environment, the world will turn against you.” The most important thing is to find ways to influence the end users of laminate products in an appropriate manner so as to achieve higher consumption figures.

The natural resource of the wood-based panel industry is wood, and that gives rise to two simple questions: How does the use of wood affect the environment, and what consequences does this for the public opinion? Halders, in plain and simple words: “I don’t know any one who hates trees, and no one in his right mind will jump for joy when he sees a tree axed.” He had no problem linking these thoughts to wood-based panels: if we want a green planet, we will have to use more wood-based panels and less solid wood.

A hand kiss for saving

Halders’ observations did not necessarily represent new insights. However, in PR terms he conveyed his message in an original manner, and many in this sector would do well to take this to heart in their public appearances.

The Dutchman made it clear that the wood-based panel industry contributes in a major way to the sustainability of wood resources, since it means more efficient use of wood as a raw material. “Thanks to our industry, fast-growing softwood can be used more efficiently and wood waste can be reused in the form of boards and panels. This reduces the use of wood and thus helps to conserve natural forests.”

Halders supported these claims with some impressive figures.

Each year some 25 million acres of the world’s forest areas disappear, in particular in the tropics. In other regions, however, such as Europe, we see a net increase in this area. In North America and Asia about 20% of the available forests are grown for wood consumption; in the rest of the world this is only 5%. As a logical consequence, the pressure on the forests in North America and Asia is greater, and therefore efficient use of these raw materials is more urgent than ever before in these regions.

Now what are the most conspicuous effects of the wood-based panel (WBP) industry on the forests? Halders had some clear answers: the WBP industry needs a sustainably used forest area of 37 million acres. This roughly corresponds to the size of Georgia or of Austria and the Czech Republic taken together. The wood for the WBP industry usually comes from forests under sustainable management programmes.

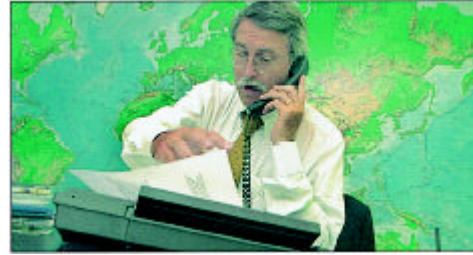
Succeeding with ecological marketing

The fact is – as Halders put it – that the users today take account of the long-term environmental effects in their decision to buy or not to buy. Ikea, for instance, sets great store by certified wood, and so do other major furniture stores. They advertise their products such as furniture by claiming that they are made from FSC-certified wood.

If you look at the global forest resources, it is no surprise that the users have been sensitized. After all, the global forest area has been reduced by more than 50% in the past 50 years. When you consider the growth of the world population and the corresponding expected increase in wood consumption, it will be clear that the developments of the past cannot be allowed to continue unchecked.

In 1987 the Brundtland Committee formulated an excellent definition of sustainable development: sustainable development is development that satisfies the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The beauty of this definition is that not even the most hard-boiled politician can allow himself the luxury of disagreeing with it.

Hence, sustainability is a factor that is rapidly increasing in importance in economic terms. In this context mention should also be made of John Elkington's book 'Cannibals with Forks'. This is a legitimate reference, for after all the point is that three parameters, viz. People, Planet and Profit, are to be optimized simultaneously in a sustainable industry. Elkington's thesis is: when one parameter is optimized at the expense of the others, this inevitably leads to abortive developments.



Leon P.M. Halders, Vice-President Marketing & Sales at DSM Melamine

Now let's pause a minute to think: what has this got to do with the wood-based panel industry? Halders' views and thoughts did not just sound good, but are also legitimate PR culture. The wood-based panel industry does not form part of the global forestation problem, but represents a solution that allows us to combine an attractive standard of living with the use of wood and to be in sync with the environment. This can be backed up by arguments that surely are among the best kept secrets of the business world, since growth can be stimulated and this industry – what is meant is the wood-based panel industry – can be made more attractive for investors.

The key point of Halders' presentation was the question what can be done to turn the sustainable character of the wood-based panel industry into a pot of gold. Things that come to mind are an increase in housing construction as well as maintenance of and improvements in housing construction and higher quality standards for furniture, kitchens and bathrooms.

He concluded his presentation with the reflection that laminate managers should start to unlimit their way of thinking and try to find ways to benefit from the growing needs of the consumer. *Bernd Amschl*

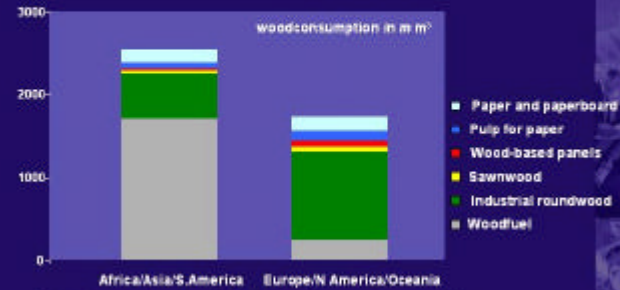
25 m acres (10m ha) of forest area disappear annually

The global forestation balance resulted in a net change of -23.2 m acres/a ($0.2\%/a$), during the 1990s. (Size of Virginia is 25.3 m acres).



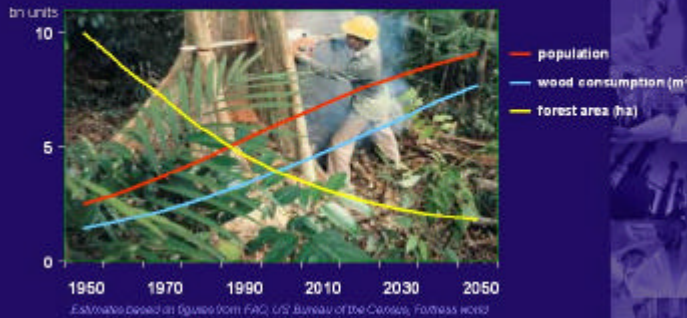
Source: FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000

Half of forest loss is due to clearance; of the remaining consumption 50% is wood fuel



Estimates based on figures from FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000

Global wood resources



Consumer awareness will stimulate further growth

