



Sustainability at the heart of BASF's core

A state-of-the-art research and design facility for leather chemicals at BASF's headquarters for Asia is central to the chemical group's philosophy that sustainable solutions will be created through a sustained focus on innovation.

"In the past year we have introduced a new strategy that brings sustainability more closely into our business than ever before," explained Dr Mei Yu, head of East Asia R&D for leather chemicals, while hosting a tour of the facility in Shanghai in September 2013.

The site houses a €55 million innovation lab and research centre, established in November 2012, where 450 researchers work in numerous labs across 35,000 square-metres of space. It encompasses separate areas for studying wet-end processes and finishing technology and the company has plans to build a second, similar-sized centre on the site in the near future.

"We analyse the markets and believe that in the future, consumers and society as a whole will have a greater awareness of ecology and therefore higher demands, not only from products but also from the brands, and in turn, brands will face more stringent specifications and ecological demands," said Zane Yu, head of regional business management. "Our challenge will be to provide a sustainable solution for the industry and innovation is a key driver of this."

The Singapore-headquartered leather chemicals business unit is striving for local production in all the major regions, and sees

Asia as one of the most important growth areas. The focus in terms of R&D at the site is chemicals for the automotive and high-end leather segment, as well as for the footwear industry, and the team is working on developments for breathable, waterproof leather, among others.

"We have a very clear target to focus on growth and concrete action plans for our business operations," said Zane Yu. "We think automotive and premium leathers will be the growth points."

The company's 'verbund' - meaning 'integrated' - strategy involves combining all departments, including R&D and production, at one site, which it says benefits customers by reducing time to market. "The innovation campus delivers ideas, which go into development and production, and the reaction is fed back to the campus," said Mr Yu, stressing the cyclical nature of product development. "Our innovation centre does not solely concentrate on new products, we also focus on improvement of current technologies, support product stewardship and shelf-life extension, and offer training."

He added that clients are welcome to use the company's facilities for their own specific testing purposes.

BASF - which developed the first synthetic tanning agent for the wet end, Basyntan, in 1911 and the first acrylate dispersion for finishing, Corialgrund A, in 1928 - is set to launch a new campaign as part of its 'We don't just make chemicals, we create chemistry' strategy, to drive home the sustainability message to clients and consumers. ☉

The first BASF Innovation Campus Asia Pacific was inaugurated in November 2012 at the Pudong site (top left) in Shanghai, marking the company's single most important innovation investment in Asia Pacific. It comprises of various lab buildings including a new R&D Centre (top right), Asian Technical Centres (bottom left) and a Polyurethane Technical R&D Center.

