



Stahl's Centre of Excellence focuses on apparel and furniture

World Leather reports on the opening of Stahl's new Centre of Excellence dedicated to apparel and furniture in northeastern Spain.

On June 1, *World Leather* was among those given access to a new Centre of Excellence opened by leather chemicals manufacturer Stahl. The facility, which is based at the company's existing Parets del Vallès manufacturing site, around 20 kilometres outside of Barcelona, is dedicated to the apparel and furniture sectors and will focus on the development of performance coating solutions, leather chemicals and polymer technologies for these industries.

The company invited more than 250 guests to the official opening of the centre, including customers, machinery manufacturers, and furniture and clothing brands. They were welcomed to the event by Huub van Beijeren, CEO of Stahl. His opening remarks were followed by presentations by Kurt Schlaepfer, head of customer relationship management for Bluesign, and Joan Marine Alcarria, sustainability and quality control manager at Inditex. Both speakers insisted that the best way to make progress in any particular supply chain is to work together more closely and openly. This helps to ensure that the best available chemical technology can be used to address the concerns of consumers and the brands who supply them. Mr van Beijeren agrees: "At Stahl, we believe that to create the future, the best thing to do is to work in the right way with your partners."

With expenditure in excess of €5.5 million, this represents one of the largest investments it has made in this type of facility. Around 60 people will be based in the centre, working on product development and performing technical trials. The company says it has invested in "state-of-the-art equipment for polymer research, leather chemicals technology and coating solutions" related to the apparel and furniture industries.

The local manager for Spain, Vasco da Silva, explained that the new centre will allow the company's experts to work alongside partners to "share knowledge and showcase our latest solutions, innovations and technologies". The facility has a new coating machine that allows for transfer coating or direct coating processes, as well as equipment for tests like flame retardants. Mr Beijeren believes it will provide a platform for "a wide range of partners and colleagues" to learn about coatings and chemicals for leather and for synthetic materials.

Ahead of the curve

The company has been taking steps to update and modernise the development centres it operates around the world. The new facility in Spain is the latest in these efforts, but there is much more to come, and plans are already in



The new Centre of Excellence will help Stahl to continue to develop "future-proof" solutions, according to chief executive Huib van Beijeren.

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place to develop a number of other sites. This strategy has been put into action because Stahl appreciates the changes taking place in supply chains and the need for a more transparent approach to business. Director of sustainability, Mike Costello, says the company's "contribution to sustainability is through transparency". This is already an important part of its corporate strategy, and it involves "promoting transparency throughout the whole supply chain".

Stahl operates a number of Centres of Excellence for the automotive industry, the most recent of which was opened at its Waalwijk headquarters in the Netherlands in September 2015. While their focus is on leather and synthetic developments for the automotive sector, the Parets del Vallès site will provide the same level of support for non-automotive businesses. This will be for both leather, including wet end, and synthetic materials.

Similar to its Waalwijk site, the equipment installed at the new facility is production-scale. This will allow the company's own technicians to work closely with partners to run industrial-scale trials, making them better prepared when they get to the production sites of their customers and helping them to minimise the downtime of production equipment.

"The opening of this Centre of Excellence is an example of how we can use knowledge and expertise to develop tailor-made, future-proof solutions," Mr van Beijeren insists. He adds that this mindset has allowed it to develop leather chemicals and performance coatings that are "ahead of legislation", even as far as being compliant with legislation not due to come into force until 2020. 🌱



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