



The Hulshof tannery in Lichtenvoorde



€5 million investment

It was in the 1980s that the tannery began to make fundamental changes to the way its effluent and waste was being handled and it invested in state-of-the-art treatment facilities as part of its 'cleaner environment' policy. The facilities have been upgraded on a number of occasions but last year Hulshof decided to innovate again, in a major €5 million project. It dismantled its purification plant, which was in effect in the heart of the village, and has instead replaced the entire system with a high-tech anaerobic biological purification plant outside the village. The new treatment plant is two kilometres away from the tannery and required extensive pipework. The company's environmental care system is now seen as example for the entire EU industry and this integrated system is the only one of its kind in the Netherlands. It gains in savings on energy costs and produces

minimal amounts of sludge. A combination of innovation and synergy in working with the local water authorities has also reduced manpower costs by 25%. The Hulshof

A prize-winning tannery

The people of the Netherlands take social and environmental issues very seriously. Companies know that to survive they must invest in best practice, especially because the waterways and rivers of Holland are crucial to the country's wellbeing, and need to be maintained at the highest ecological standard. While tanners in other European nations have often been heard to complain about the onerous burdens placed on them to meet EU and national environmental legislation, one of Holland's tanners seems to revel in meeting the challenge. In fact, the company appears to be setting the standards for others to follow. Hulshof is seen as an EU role model in terms of meeting the regulations imposed under the EU's I.P.P.C. (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) Directive which also covers tanneries where treatment capacity exceeds 12 tonnes of finished products per day.

There is something of the crusader about Dr Hermann Hulshof who heads the tannery which bears the family name, Hulshof's Royal Dutch Tanneries, based in Lichtenvoorde: he believes in investing in the future of the business, its people and its neighbours. He sees it as crucial to the company's prosperity and survival, and not just in terms of being able to compete with other tanneries, especially those in south-east Asia. Social responsibility is very much part of the company's mission statement.

As someone who has been president of COTANCE, Dr Hulshof claims, "It is our responsibility [as tanners] to do all we can to protect the environment worldwide and we are confident that we are now the best in the field. One way we do this at Lichtenvoorde is by making sure that we never squander any materials. Processes are controlled to ensure that only the minimum amount of materials necessary to do the job are used in every aspect of our manufacturing processes. Another is by recycling as much of our waste products as possible while taking great care that we always use biodegradable, earth-friendly materials if they are available.

"By combining our 125-year-old tanning skills with today's cutting edge technologies, it's possible to produce a better leather at a lower cost and still protect our most valuable resource, a clean and healthy planet."

approach to business has now been rewarded with the Netherlands' National Prize for sound social enterprise, winning the coveted Care & Profit Prize for 2004. The award, for which fifty-six leading companies had entered, was presented by the director of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Hulshof is the first business to have received this national award, which it will hold for two years. "The company finds itself in an industrial playground that is shrinking in Western Europe, but nonetheless Hulshof succeeds in more than just making ends meet, by adding even more on top of the legally compulsory environment measures, investing in personnel, liveability of the neighbourhood, new products and buildings," state the Award assessors. "Hulshof has put its ears to the ground in the neighbourhood, in order to ascertain the wishes of the neighbours and other beneficiaries."

It appears to be a win-win situation. 🌐



The new state-of-the-art treatment plant