Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

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ment and further enhance the group’s international competitiveness, he predicts.

Lomon Billions has been manufacturing TiO₂ pigments for more than 30 years and has five production plants at four sites located in Jiaozuo (Henan Province), Deyang (Sichuan Province), Xiangyang (Hubei Province) and Chuxiong (Yunnan Province). It also operates an ilmenite mine in Panzhihua (Sichuan Province). The new office in China’s international metropolis of Shanghai therefore provides a centralized location for the company’s sales and technical services teams. Lomon Billions’ global headquarters and 12 000 m² technology centre are in Jiaozuo and the company also has regional offices in North America and Europe.

In line with the company’s strategic investment plans to grow its business and strengthen its competitiveness through vertical and horizontal integration, the board of directors at Lomon Billions has also recently approved plans to invest RMB700 million (c. US$98.5 million) to establish a new titanium metal subsidiary, Gansu Guotai Metal Co, Ltd in China. The new subsidiary will mine ilmenite and produce titanium slag, titanium sponge and titanium alloy.

More information: www.lomonbillions.global

Tronox signs agreement to acquire TiZir Titanium and Iron; posts 1Q 2020 results

Titanium dioxide producer Tronox has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Eramet’s TiZir Titanium and Iron (TTI) business for about US$300 million. The transaction will provide Tronox with increased titanium feedstock capacity, which will allow the company to serve its pigment customers better, it says. The planned deal has received the unanimous approval of the boards of directors of both Tronox and Eramet. Closure is subject to certain consents and customary closing conditions, including regulatory approvals.

TiZir’s TTI facility is situated in Tyssedal, Norway. Described by Tronox as a ‘well-established, high-quality asset’, it upgrades ilmenite to produce high-grade titanium slag and high-purity pig iron with annual capacities of around 230 000 tonnes and 90 000 tonnes, respectively. The technology and manufacturing capabilities that Tronox is acquiring will reduce the cost of obtaining the feedstocks needed to run its pigment plants – with the Norwegian site ideally located to supply feedstock to the company’s European pigment facilities – while also broadening the geographic diversity of the titanium feedstock operations, comments Tronox CEO Jeffry N. Quinn. The planned transaction will also improve the likelihood of a successful commissioning, ramp up and eventual acquisition of the Jazan titanium slag smelter in Saudi Arabia, a project that Tronox has been involved with since 2018. ‘This highly strategic acquisition represents the next step in advancing our vertical integration strategy, providing Tronox with increased titanium feedstock capacity to better fulfil our internal requirements and, in turn, better serve our pigment customers with a low-cost, secure source of supply’, Quinn says.

As part of the transaction, Tronox will also enter into a supply agreement with Eramet’s Grande Côte Operations (GCO) mineral sands mine in Dakar, Senegal (the world’s largest single-dredge mineral sands operation) to provide Grande Côte’s ilmenite to TTI. For the first two years, Tronox expects that the GCO mine will supply substantially all of TTI’s requirements; however, the volumes sold reduce throughout the term of the agreement, allowing the company the flexibility to supply TTI from its own mineral sands assets or other sources.

Elsewhere, Tronox has expanded its partnership with Safic-Alcal, recently appointing the company as the exclusive distributor of its entire TiONA range of titanium dioxide pigment products in France, Benelux and Turkey. TiONA pigments provide high-performance benefits in plastics, rubber, coatings, inks, paper and other products, according to Tronox.

For the first quarter of 2020, Tronox generated net income of $40 million and income from operations of $79 million on revenue of $722 million. Due to the acquisition of Cristal [ADPO, June 2019, pp. 8–9], these results showed a significant improvement from the corresponding figures in 1Q 2019, when the company reported a net loss of $30 million, income from operations of $16 million and sales revenue of $390 million. On a pro forma basis (as if the Tronox and Cristal businesses had been combined from 1 January 2019 rather than from 10 April 2019), the company posted a net loss of $18 million in 1Q 2019 and revenue of $720 million. The acquisition resulted in total cost synergies of $45 million in the first quarter of 2020, Tronox reports.

Sales of titanium dioxide totalled $580 million in 1Q 2020 up 109% compared to $277 million ($570 million
The company’s operations have been designated as essential during the COVID-19 pandemic – given the applications of titanium dioxide, zircon and other co-products in critical products such as food and medical packaging, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and personal protective equipment – and all Tronox sites are operating. As of May 2020, the company reported that demand for titanium dioxide remained mixed across regions, with North America being the most resilient and China improving, offset by weaker demand in regions hit hardest by the virus, such as southern Europe, Brazil and India. It expects volumes for 2Q 2020 to decline by approximately 20% compared to first-quarter levels. In response to the economic uncertainties wrought by the coronavirus crisis, Tronox is reducing its full-year 2020 capital expenditure by at least $50 million to $225 million.

More information: www.tronox.com

Cologne

Global carbon black supplier Orion Engineered Carbons is investing in a new logistics centre at its largest manufacturing facility in Cologne, Germany. Construction of the shell was scheduled for completion at the end of June, with handover and commissioning of the new centre expected in December. Once complete, the central warehouse will occupy an area of 8850 m², equivalent to a capacity of approximately 12 400 pallets.

Orion’s Cologne plant produces some 160 000 tonnes of carbon black each year in more than 100 differentiated grades, which must be treated and handled very carefully, reports Dr Sandra Niewiem, senior VP specialty carbon black and EMEA region. The new, modern distribution centre will enable the company to grow its business further in a location where it has deep roots, she says.

The new warehouse, which Orion will lease from logistics service provider Grieshaber, will have eight truck docks. It will equalize plant traffic, with about 100 trucks passing through the facility each day. With consolidation into one location, the new warehouse will also eliminate internal logistics, the company says. Utilizing a space-optimized shuttle warehouse system and connected to the production plant via an automated material conveyor system, the new warehouse ‘will be able to guarantee a smooth and even more efficient flow of goods’, according to Grieshaber.

In other facilities news, Orion also recently officially opened its new technical service applications laboratory in New Jersey, USA [ADPO, January 2020, pp. 8–9], expanding its global network of labs and strengthening its specialty carbon black business in the Americas.

More information: www.orioncarbons.com

Clariant posts weaker results due to ‘unprecedented’ economic environment

For the first quarter of 2020, Clariant posted sales from continuing operations of CHF1.019 billion (c. €950 million) compared to 1Q 2019 sales of CHF1.164 billion (restated to take into account the reclassification of the Masterbatches and Pigments businesses as discontinued operations during 2019). This corresponds to a 6% decline in sales in local currency terms but a 12% decrease in Swiss francs due to unfavourable currency translation.

The continuing operations EBITDA for the 2020 quarter was CHF157 million, down 14% in Swiss francs from CHF183 million a year earlier due to the decline in sales. However, the company emphasizes the resilience of the EBITDA margin at 15.4% compared to 15.7% in 1Q 2019, underpinned by ‘rapid and efficient implementation’ of cost control measures, it reports.

By region, Latin America and the Middle East and Africa were the only areas to achieve sales increases in local currency terms. Despite the impact of COVID-19 in China during 1Q 2020, sales development in Asia was ‘robust’ overall, according to the company, with a contraction in the low single-digit range. Sales in North America decreased slightly but weakened significantly in Europe. By business area (BA), the Natural Resources BA, which now includes the Additives business, posted a 2% increase in local currency sales in 1Q 2020. Sales in the Care Chemicals and Catalysis BAs declined. For the discontinued Masterbatches and Pigments operations, 1Q