

Press release

50 Years of Innovation from Kaiserslautern

Successful Shared Site with Three Business Groups / State Prize for Inclusion Received Twice

Weinheim, October 27, 2020. From a spirit of collaboration and inclusion to Family Day: Kaiserslautern is a site that cares about values. Roughly 600 employees from the Business Groups, Freudenberg Performance Materials (FPM), Freudenberg Filtration Technologies (FFT) and Freudenberg Medical (FM) work here closely together for the Freudenberg Group. And it is a tremendously successful collaboration! For 50 years, innovative technologies have been produced and developed here, such as technical nonwovens for the manufacture of high-quality face masks, a new sensor technology for the production of medical silicone tubing, or innovative cabin air filters for the global automotive industry. Moreover, Kaiserslautern has twice received the Rhineland-Palatinate state prize for the exemplary employment of severely disabled people, most recently in 2016.

“We have enjoyed great collaboration for many years, with the rapid start of face mask production this year as one example,” says Alexander Barnsteiner, site manager and SEO of Freudenberg Performance Materials. “I have worked in Production for 25 years, and I appreciate the way everyone here feels like family,” says Werner Zinsmeister, who works in Production at FPM. “I am happy to have this opportunity and I feel very comfortable at my workplace,” adds Reinhold Witt. Since February 2016, this young man with a learning disability has worked for

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Freudenberg Medical. Three different people who represent the Kaiserslautern site and give it a face.

Continuous investments

One hundred thousand people currently live in the university city in southern Rhineland-Palatinate. Framed by trees, the factory site of the Freudenberg Group is situated not far from the highway exit. When the company signed the purchase agreement for the property together with BASF in 1970 in order to produce spunlaid nonwovens as a joint venture, no one imagined that five decades later three Freudenberg Business Groups would be developing innovations for the world in Kaiserslautern. In 1975, Freudenberg took over the company and continuously expanded production: What was at the time Europe's most state-of-the-art high-bay warehouse was built in 1984 with capacity for 25 million square meters of spunlaid nonwovens.

In the year 1990, a regranulation plant was put into operation for recycling spunlaid nonwovens. Nonwovens for the manufacturing of filters have also been produced on the meltblown plant since 1998. A new plant to produce micronAir® combi cabin air filters went into operation in 2002. Helix Medical (today Freudenberg Medical), founded in 2009, opened its European headquarters in Kaiserslautern. In 2010, Helix Medical began with an injection molding plant and a clean room to manufacture silicone seal rings for medical devices. FPM opened another regranulation plant in 2013, which is used to recycle nearly 100 percent of the startup scrap and edge strips from daily production. A new logistics center for cabin air filters was opened in 2014 by Freudenberg Filtration Technologies. These are just a few highlights from the successful history of the site.

Technical nonwovens for the medical industry

The newest addition will be the recently announced expansion of nonwoven media production capacity. This was developed especially for the medical technology industry by FPM experts. As part of the project, Freudenberg is investing in the construction of a new, state-of-the-art meltblown plant, which is expected to go into operation in the first quarter of 2021.

A lot has been accomplished during the coronavirus pandemic: The 280 experts at FPM, together with specialists at FFT, developed new, optimized nonwovens, commissioned plants for the production of face masks, established strict safety and hygiene rules for the production areas, and trained employees. What would normally have taken several months, Freudenberg achieved in just a few weeks and with the support of all the Business Groups at the site: Since April 2020, the company has produced masks in Kaiserslautern with the brand name "Collectex". Roughly 500,000 masks are now produced here every day. Freudenberg is one of the few manufacturers capable of producing significant quantities of high-quality masks in Germany.

Medical products for use in and on the human body

Just one hundred meters from the mask production site, 50 employees work in the Freudenberg Medical competence center for medical silicone products for use in and on the human body. Silicone is used, for example, in delivery systems for cancer medication, implants and other technologies that save lives and improve patients' quality of life.

Employees in the clean rooms working in white protective gowns produce silicone tubing with diameters from 0.3 millimeters to five centimeters, such as for pacemakers or pumps used in the pharmaceutical industry. Every year, about 100 tons of silicone tubing leaves the site. The inner diameter is the critical factor here.

Anything that deviates must be disposed of. That is why Freudenberg specialists in Kaiserslautern spent one-and-a-half years developing the new sensor technology Helix iMC. This unique innovation makes it possible to reduce waste and environmental impact by more than 25 percent. At Kaiserslautern, it already reduces the amount of non-recyclable cured silicone waste by about two tons per year.

Combi filters for the global automotive industry

Filters are manufactured in another production hall just a few meters farther along. Innovative activated carbon combi filters are developed and produced here by 260 FFT employees. One little-known fact: Over 30 years ago, Freudenberg developed the first cabin air filters installed in cars as a standard feature, launching a new industry sector. The first model in the world to include a standard cabin air filter was the 1989 Mercedes-Benz SL. Brands such as BMW, VW and Audi began offering cabin air filters as options soon after. In 1991, the Opel Astra rolled off the conveyor belt as the first mass-market vehicle with a standard micronAir® cabin air filter. This is how Freudenberg became the market leader as a supplier – a status it still holds today. The most recent innovation from Kaiserslautern is the micronAir® Gas Shield activated carbon modules for cabin air filters. Since the start of 2019, these have offered previously unheard-of protection against many gaseous pollutants, from nitrous and sulfur dioxide to ammonia, ozone, and aldehydes. From Kaiserslautern to the world – a path followed once again by the newest generation of innovative cabin air filters.

But innovation is not the only area in which Kaiserslautern serves as a role model. Here, inclusion is also more than just a buzzword: Alongside the work in the production halls, finishing work for the filter production is performed on the premises by a large team of people with disabilities. People with disabilities also work in other areas, such as Production and in office settings. Many

workstations are modified or reconfigured for this with the help of integration teams. At the site in Kaiserslautern, the number of disabled employees is around twelve percent above the legally required level. This commitment was recognized with the Rhineland-Palatinate state prize for the exemplary employment of severely disabled people for the second time in 2016. “It is always a great success when it is possible to integrate a disabled individual into the working world,” says Beate Knauber, support specialist for disabled employees at the Freudenberg Group.

Competence, a desire to innovate, and integrity are also fostered by the outstanding collaboration at the site. This is how new products are created, while others are developed and improved with and for the customers. “Many of us have known each other for years, and we enjoy working together. There is a special camaraderie that also makes the work go more smoothly,” says Barnsteiner. He is looking forward to seeing how the site continues to develop in the coming years. He feels very at home at the Kaiserslautern site, where collaboration, partnership, and values go hand in hand.

About the Freudenberg Group

Freudenberg is a global technology group that strengthens its customers and society long-term through forward-looking innovations. Together with its partners, customers and research institutions, the Freudenberg Group develops leading-edge technologies and excellent products and services for about 40 markets and for thousands of applications: seals, vibration control components, technical textiles, filters, cleaning technologies and products, specialty chemicals and medical products.

Innovation strength, strong customer orientation, diversity, and team spirit are the cornerstones of the Group. The 170-year-old company lives by its core values: a commitment to excellence, reliability and pro-active, responsible action.

In 2019, the Freudenberg Group employed some 49,000 people in around 60 countries worldwide and generated sales of more than €9.4 billion. For more information, please visit www.freudenberg.com.