

POST-REPORT

World Pultrusion Conference 2024

Positive mood despite difficult market environment

The 17th World Pultrusion Conference (WPC) took place from February 29 to March 1, 2024



with a record number of participants. This year, almost 150 participants took the opportunity to network in an impressive setting and learn about the latest developments and innovations in 25 specialist presentations.

The conference takes place every two years in different European countries and is the most important event of its kind in Europe. The WPC is organized by the AVK for the European Pultrusion Technology Association

(EPTA) in cooperation with the American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA).

It was already time to cast off on February 28. Around 50 participants met for a welcome cocktail in Willi's Bierstube, right in the Hotel Hamburg Hafen.

As is the case throughout the hotel, Willi's Bierstube also has close ties to the port, Hamburg and maritime history. All in all, the traditional hotel above the Landungsbrücken in the St. Pauli district has been delighting guests for over 40 years with its maritime flair and unique view over the harbor and the Elbe. The family-run private hotel can also look back on an eventful history. In the 19th century, it initially served as a sailor's home and later as a naval training center, among other things. Even today, the classicist building is a treasure trove of Hanseatic maritime history. Throughout the building, you can marvel at numerous old collector's items and immerse yourself in the history of Hamburg and shipping. The response to the location from participants was consistently positive and formed the basis for an extremely successful and positive event, which could not have been expected in the current difficult market environment.



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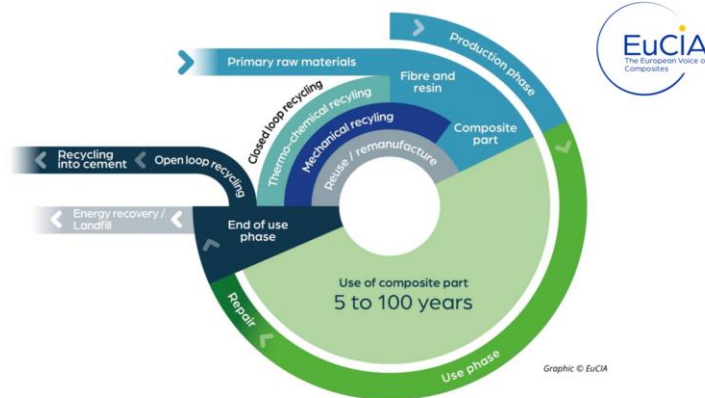
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years. In 2022, the European production volume for composites fell by 9%. A further decline of 8% in the overall market for composites in Europe is now expected for 2023. In contrast, the global market for composites has developed positively in the past year and has a total volume of 13 million tons for 2023 with growth of around 5%. Overall, market momentum in Europe was significantly lower than worldwide. Europe's share of the global market has fallen to around 20%.

There are many reasons for this. The main drivers are likely to be the persistently high energy and commodity prices. In addition, there are still problems in individual areas of the logistics chains, for example on individual trade/container routes, as well as a cautious consumer climate. A slowdown in global trade and uncertainties in the political arena are currently fueling the negative sentiment in the market.

The two central areas of application for the composites industry in general, but also for the pultrusion industry in particular, are the construction/infrastructure sector and the mobility sector. The construction industry as a central application area is currently in crisis. Although the order books are still well filled, new orders are often failing to materialize. High interest rates and material costs coupled with the high cost of living are having a particularly negative impact on private construction. However, public construction is also currently unable to achieve the targets it has set itself. According to the ZDB (Zentralverband Deutsches Baugewerbe), the forecasts in this important sector remain gloomy: "The decline in the construction industry is continuing. Turnover will fall by 5.3% in real terms this year and we expect a further 3% drop next year. Residential construction remains responsible for the decline, which will slump by 11% in real terms this year and continue its downward trajectory at -13% in 2024." Despite rising registration figures, the automotive industry, the most important application area for composites, has not yet returned to its pre-2020 volume. At present, politicians do not seem to be succeeding in creating a more positive environment for the industry with appropriate measures.

Sustainability is increasingly becoming a central topic in the industry and a relevant factor in all areas of application. Due to this fact, several presentations on this topic also formed the opening of the conference on the first day of the event.



In two presentations by the European Composites Industry Association (EuCIA) and the American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA), progress and the political framework in the respective regions were explained. Both presentations came to the conclusion that sustainability has also become a key issue for the composites industry and that the pressure on all players within the industry to act will increase in the coming years.

Composites have excellent properties in this area, and much progress has already been made in recent years in terms of data collection and standardization. These must be increasingly highlighted and also emphasized to the public. Both leading trade associations will continue to promote the topic through corresponding political and normative activities and attempt to support the industry in its practical implementation.

The following presentations, in which innovations in the area of processes as well as in the two central application areas of automotive and construction/infrastructure were explained, prove that the best way to meet a challenging market environment is through innovation. The use of thermoplastic materials, still a specialty in the field of pultrusion, is making significant progress and enables both new process control and the use of pultruded profiles in new areas of application. For example, the company Röchling explained the possible use of corresponding products in large-volume and recyclable constructions of highly stressed components using the example of a strut brace in the car sector. The following two presentations were also dedicated to the exciting topic of the automobile. First, the possibilities of replacing aluminum in crash absorbers with CFRP were explained, followed by the possibilities of pultrusion in continuous composite systems in automotive applications.



The wind industry continues to be a driver of the composites market, even though there are no longer any manufacturers of such blades in Europe. Nevertheless, it is the use of GRP and CFRP that enables the current development of the wind industry towards a society that is as CO₂-free as possible. A corresponding presentation was dedicated to this important topic and highlighted the latest developments in the field of pultrusion for the wind sector

Further presentations on the overarching topics of quality assurance and recycling concluded the first day of the event with 15 outstanding specialist presentations at the highest level. The participants were impressed by the high technical level of the speakers and the very well presented topics.

However, this was not the end of the first day of the event. In the evening, the participants met again in the Elbkuppel for a gala dinner. Here, the guests took advantage of the special ambience for professional and interdisciplinary exchange. The evening was all about networking with old acquaintances and new contacts. Once again, the Hotel Hafen Hamburg was able to impress with a buffet of the highest standard and underlined the quality of this first, special day of the event.



The second day of the event began with a look at the topic of sustainability from a company perspective. Excel Composites provided an insight into how they deal with the topic and

showed their own measures and procedures before Thomas Wegmann, speaker from AOC, presented his view on recycling and analyzing the life cycle potential of composite materials. It was also important to look beyond one's own nose and at the individual CO2 footprint of each individual, which was clearly illustrated. The following eight presentations were again dedicated to the topic of innovations, both in the area of raw materials and in the process area. Here, institutes with their current research efforts and the industry itself had their say.

At the end of the event, all participants agreed that the visit to Hamburg was worthwhile - not only because of the special charm, but also because of the positive mood within the pultrusion industry. Driven by innovation and against the backdrop of a difficult environment, the industry sees itself well positioned for the future, as do composites in general.

Sustainable, durable, open to innovation and very personal: this is how the industry presented itself in Hamburg. We look forward to organizing the 18th WPC in two years' time and meeting new friends and old acquaintances.

Press enquiries

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