

Making it in Leeds

News release from Leeds Manufacturing

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Next Generation Agfa Product Helps Industry & Environment

Agfa UK's Leeds plant at Seacroft is working round the clock to satisfy the rapidly growing worldwide demand for its latest innovation in printing plate technology, the Thermo-Fuse chemistry free computer to plate (CTP) product range.

Following the success of its market-leading Lithostar printing plate, Agfa has now developed the "next generation" Thermo-Fuse – a heat-sensitive thermal plate family that undergoes a physical change when exposed to Infra Red (light) laser rather than a chemical change.

Site manager Graham Cooper describes it as a massive step forward for printers and the environment: “With no chemicals, waste or worries about light exposure, developer concentration and temperature variations, it makes for reliable hassle-free plate making for the printer with much lower impact on the environment than conventional chemically developed CTP plates.”

Developed by Agfa with initial production in Germany, the introduction of the new products required over £300,000 investment to modify the two Seacroft production lines. These projects were handled by in-house Agfa engineers with the installation contracts handed to Dewsbury-based Chem Resist and Leeds Based H&C Moore. A further £400,000 sum has also been invested in high definition scanning technology to enhance quality checking during the production process.

Both production lines are now fully enclosed to prevent any product contamination – with an added health and safety advantage and operatives wear “clean room” suits to avoid any loose fibres in the atmosphere and reduce faults in the production process.

The semi-finished plates travel from Leeds to Agfa France for completion and the two plants co-operate closely on production schedules.

Graham Cooper adds: “Agfa Graphics employs 4,700 people worldwide and has a turnover of 1.35bn Euros. We have over 90 highly productive staff here in Leeds, making a significant proportion of the group – and therefore – the world’s litho plates. By continuing to manage best practices at all times, we plan to continue contributing significantly to global growth.”

Continued investment in Agfa’s Leeds plant is good news for the city, the largest centre for print and publishing outside London. Paul Stephens, Leeds City Council’s chief economic services officer, said: “Businesses will face increasing pressure over the next few years to minimise the environmental impact of their activities. But, as the experience of Agfa’s Leeds plant demonstrates, there are major opportunities to be had for companies that respond to these challenges proactively, with innovative and forward-thinking solutions.”

Graham Cooper comments: “We’ve experienced massive change in the plant in the past 18 months in embracing new technology. However, the changes have run in tandem with our ongoing programme of continuous improvement.

Passionate about health and safety standards and environmental responsibility, Graham Cooper says: “Both are commercial imperatives and I see no conflict with business needs whatsoever – quite the opposite, in fact. In the past ten years we have sustained an excellent safety record and stripped over £6m out of annual operating costs by utilising energy and raw materials more efficiently and this has played a key role in the Leeds plant winning continued investment and led to the site winning UK national awards for sustainable manufacturing.

“We’re on the verge of achieving zero general waste to landfill figures this year, down from over 5,000 tonnes in 2005. Last year we massively reduced lighting costs with a scheme jointly funded by Agfa and Carbon Action Yorkshire. Gas consumption has also been slashed by working with the Carbon Trust to identify opportunities and then for us to invest in projects to recycle waste process heat. We are also working internally on water savings and having excellent success. Meanwhile, we’ve gone well over two years since the last injury on site moving towards our target of at least 1m exposure hours between on-site injuries which we will achieve if we remain injury free until 2014. Part of this campaign has seen forklift truck and pedestrian routes clearly marked throughout the site.”

He is equally enthusiastic in promoting manufacturing in general and as a career option for school and university leavers. Agfa Leeds currently has two apprentices in training and organises regular school visits in conjunction with the Children Challenging Industry and year 10 school work experience programmes. Agfa has worked closely with organisations including the Manufacturing Advisory Service and Business in the Community to promote sustainability and manufacturing by hosting events on the Leeds site.

Ends

Photography: Production operator Steve Holmes checks rolls of aluminium prior to processing at Agfa’s Seacroft plant

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