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 SPECIAL FEATURE

## Recycling has become mainstream

Recycling is good for the environment and creates business opportunities.



Recycling is no longer a niche activity for eco-warriors. It's become a part of the mainstream economy. Sustainability is becoming a watchword for many businesses, so it makes sense to recycle and to reuse.

Mpact Recycling has expanded its operations in KwaZulu-Natal with the opening of a new R150-million facility at Bridge City, pictured. With a larger warehouse than the company had at its previous location, a large sorting plant and two baling machines are now accommodated under one roof and there are separate administration and operations centres. Improved design allows for more efficient offloading and loading of material and a 130kW solar installation creates efficiencies with regard to energy. Mpact is considering expanding the solar installation and connecting to the local grid as a supplier or wheeling to its other facilities in the province. Mpact Recycling has three sorting and baling plants in KwaZulu-Natal and 15 branches altogether in South Africa.

Mpact Recycling is a division of the Mpact Group and processes more than 600 000 tons of waste every year. The company reports that by recycling

one ton of paper, 26 498 litres of water is saved.

The Sappi Group has a company called Sappi ReFibre which expressly aims to support the small, medium and micro-enterprise (SMME) market. By offering a secure market for certain types of recyclable board and paper, the firm gives agents the security of knowing that they can sell what they collect. Through Sappi's Enterprise and Supplier Development Programme, Sappi ReFibre has provided equipment and business support to the value of about R10-million over the years.

A new Waste Management Licence has been issued to the Mathe Group for a new tyre-recycling facility to be built alongside its existing operation. The exact amount of the investment will be determined by the technology deployed but it is estimated to be in the region of R65-million.

Truck-tyre recycling company Mathe Group is part of the PFE International Group which also contains recycled-rubber-flooring company Van Dyck and is based in Hammarsdale, between Cato Ridge and Pinetown.

The CEO of PFE is Dr Mehran Zarrebini, pictured right, who is also head of the industry body, TRIASA



**E-waste is treated as part of the Sustainable Recycling Initiative: Wandisa Radebe, wire stripper; Simphiwe Menyuka, line controller and Jabulani Khumalo.**

(Tyre Recycling Industry Association of South Africa). He notes that although the volume of waste tyres continues to grow in South Africa, the country persists in importing virgin rubber.

Because tyres are largely composed of rubber, when they are discarded, the potentially valuable rubber goes to waste. Zarrebini says, "By recycling tyres, this rubber can be salvaged and reused. This process is known as crumbing or grinding and involves breaking down the used tyres into small granules of powder. These can then be used in various applications as a replacement for new rubber. These applications range from the production of new tyres to road construction, playground surfaces and the manufacturing of rubber goods, among many others." In addition to planning for the building of a new facility, Mathe Group is expanding the capacity of its existing plant. Output will increase from between 25 and 30 tons of rubber crumb to 45 tons and increase the number of tyres recycled from 700 radial truck tyres per day to approximately 1 000 per day.

#### From carpets to flooring

Van Dyck, originally a carpeting manufacturer, pivoted away from soft flooring to rubber-based products during the Covid period but the factory was then hit by the terrible floods of 2022.

The Van Dyck operations are now also located in Hammarsdale and are also expanding. The company produces rubber goods by moulding recycled rubber crumb.

Recycled rubber flooring in a gym installation not only provides for a more comfortable performance but also enhances acoustic performance and eliminates noise pollution. Coming off a low base, Van Dyck has in 2023 registered a

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200% increase in the manufacture of moulded products. Notes Zarrebini, "Our production facility is now operating 24/7 at full capacity despite the interruptions of loadshedding. The new equipment that will arrive will enable our operations to double capacity of certain moulded products."

Most of the growth in moulded products has come from South Africa and the UK to which Van Dyck exports gym flooring, acoustic shock pads and acoustic cradles. Projects in Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya have been completed with the acoustic underlays, which are often utilised under carpeting in the hospitality sector. A popular product recently introduced by Van Dyck is a magnetically receptive rubber underlay known as Ezy Install.

#### E-waste proliferation

With the proliferation of gadgets in the world, the waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) recycling industry has become an increasingly important part of the sustainability equation.

Despite WEEE being the fastest-growing waste stream in most countries, South Africa's current recycling rate is between 2% and 2.5% for waste lighting and between 10% and 12% for other electrical and electronic equipment. As of 2021, it is illegal to send e-waste to landfill but few people know this.

RecycleX, located in Ballito and with more than 100 staff members, is one of the biggest e-waste recycling facilities in the country.

Falling under the Vuthela iLembe LED Support Programme, the Sustainable Recycling Initiative (SRI) research has highlighted that little has been done to comply with the WEEE ban.

As a result, a new partnership has been created in the iLembe District Municipality, encompassing provincial and local government, local business and residents' associations, WEEE recyclers, NGOs, representatives of waste pickers, Producer Responsibility Organisations and the SRI team. It is called "WEEE are iLembe". ■



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