Umicore invests in recycling of rechargeable batteries

Umicore has decided to build an industrial scale recycling facility for end-of-life rechargeable batteries in Hoboken, Belgium. The investment will enable Umicore to deal with the expected growth in the availability of end-of-life Lithium-ion, Lithium-Polymer and Nickel Metal Hydride rechargeable batteries. The use of such batteries is set to grow substantially, particularly as a result of the increasing numbers of (hybrid) electric vehicles ((H)EVs) on the world’s roads.

Increasingly stringent legislation is also placing a heavy premium on the efficient and eco-friendly recycling of end-of-life materials, such as used batteries1.

Umicore currently operates a small scale facility which treats spent batteries that come primarily from portable electronic equipment such as mobile phones and laptop computers. The new facility will have an initial annual capacity of 7,000 tonnes. This is the equivalent of some 150,000 (H)EV batteries or 250 million mobile phone batteries. The plant, which involves an investment of € 25 million, is expected to start operating in the first half of 2011.

The new industrial operation will use Umicore’s proprietary and patented Ultra High Temperature Smelting technology. This breakthrough recycling process has high metal yields and will drastically cut CO2 emissions compared to the primary production of cobalt and nickel. Furthermore, this process is significantly more energy efficient than any other existing battery recycling process and also guarantees that no hazardous dioxins or other volatile organic compounds are released into the environment. It complies with the strictest regulations in terms of the required recycling yields.

Currently, the process allows for the recycling of cobalt, nickel, copper and other metals and is fully in line with Umicore’s strategy of closing the materials loop. The scale-up of this new ultra high temperature smelting technology will also enable Umicore to test its suitability for recycling new streams of materials. For example, Umicore is working on developing a capability to recycle lithium for re-use in lithium-ion batteries, which are widely expected to become the battery of choice for (H)EVs.

1 By 2012 in the European Union, for example, 25 % of all portable batteries placed on the market will have to be collected and recycled. This figure will rise to 45 % by 2016.

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Umicore already counts a number of the world’s leading electronics and automotive manufacturers among its key suppliers of recyclable materials. The move to electrified automotive transport is expected to be a global trend and Umicore will, in time, be evaluating the extension of this new recycling technology to other regions.

Umicore is also the world’s largest recycler of precious metals and is a leading producer of key materials for rechargeable batteries.

For more information about Umicore Battery Recycling, please visit http://www.batteryrecycling.umicore.com/

For more information

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Umicore profile

Umicore is a materials technology group. Its activities are centred on four business areas: Advanced Materials, Precious Metals Products and Catalysts, Precious Metals Services and Zinc Specialties. Each business area is divided into market-focused business units, be it in products that are essential to everyday life or those at the cutting edge of new technological developments.

Umicore focuses on application areas where it knows its expertise in materials science, chemistry and metallurgy can make a real difference. Umicore generates approximately 50% of its revenues and spends approximately 80% of its R&D budget in the area of clean technology, such as emission control catalysts, materials for rechargeable batteries and photovoltaics, fuel cells, and precious metals recycling. Umicore’s overriding goal of sustainable value creation is based on this ambition to develop, produce and recycle materials in a way that fulfils its mission: materials for a better life.

The Umicore Group has industrial operations on all continents and serves a global customer base; it generated a turnover of € 9.2 billion (€ 2.1 billion excluding metal) in 2008 and currently employs some 14,000 people.