

By David Vink in Stuttgart

But growth rate has slowed again in second half of 2007, says AVK.

16 November 2007 – The European reinforced plastic composites industry almost tripled its rate of growth in 2006, according to the Federation of Reinforced Plastics (AVK). After growing by 2.3% in 2005, the market size increased by 6.2% to more than 1.1m tonnes in 2006, AVK said at its conference in Stuttgart, Germany.

Outgoing AVK managing director Uwe Bültjer said an increase in truck production contributed towards a 9% growth for sheet moulding compounds (SMC) to around 210,000 tonnes. There was a 1% revival in demand for bulk moulding compounds (BMC) to 75,000 tonnes, the same level as in 2004.

Within building construction, pultruded glass reinforced plastics (GRP) profile production did particularly well, with 12.2% growth to 45,000 tonnes, mainly based on demand in cable channel applications.

Bültjer also referred to the strong growth to almost 135,000 tonnes, up from 115,000 tonnes in 2003, in GRP pipe and container production. This area has received support from GRP re-lining of damaged pipes. He said that re-linings have grown from 650km in 2005, through 950km in 2006, with 1,300km of re-linings estimated for 2007.

Elsewhere, food contact approval has also led recently to the use of SMC for large potable water containers in arid regions. GMT/LFT continued its strong growth to well over 90,000 tonnes, compared with just under 70,000 tonnes in 2003.

Bültjer accepted that the high temperature resistance of BMC is less important today, as the automotive industry increasingly introduces cold light technology, leading to "stagnation but at a high level". But it still remains the lowest cost material for headlamp reflectors, an application accounting for 92% of the use of BMC, he said.

In 2007, the market showed high first half growth, but due to a decline in automotive production and uncertainty in the building industry in the second half, Bültjer said the full year will show weaker growth than in 2006. However, "it is unlikely that the 5% [growth rate] will be undercut", he said.