

Wentworth Opening Polish Thermoform Plant

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DUSSELDORF, GERMANY - Wentworth Technologies Co. Ltd. plans to continue tapping Eastern Europe for growth by opening a new thermoforming plant in Poland and looking for more opportunities there.

The processing and mold-making company in Mississauga, Ontario, will open a 40,000-square-foot facility in early November in Zarnowiec, Poland, Wentworth President Walter Kuskowski said Oct. 28 at K 2001 in Dusseldorf. The plant is the firm's second in Poland and third in Europe.

"It's a high-tech venture that will deliver products at low cost," Kuskowski said. "We cannot serve Europe from North America. We expect to invest a lot more in new facilities there."

The new Polish unit will be Wentworth's first in Europe to make thermoformed parts, and the company expects to become a major plastic cup producer on that continent, Kuskowski said.

The firm entered the thermoforming business in February 1999 when it bought Amhil Engineering Ltd. of Mississauga and the assets of Therma Systems Inc. of South Plainfield, N.J. Since then, Wentworth has opened a second thermoforming plant in Dixon, Tenn.

Wentworth is investing \$4 million to \$5 million in the new building, land and equipment, including the installation of two high-speed thermoforming lines using equipment from Davis-Standard and John Brown Machinery. The equipment will allow Wentworth to produce as many as 5 million cup lids per day, he said.

The facility, starting with 40-50 employees, will be in a tax-free zone near the port city of Gdansk, Poland. The company will pay no taxes in the zone for 10 years and then will pay only half the country's tax rate for the following five years, he said. The subsidiary will be called Amhil Europa.

Kuskowski, a Polish immigrant who worked for General Electric Co. in Ontario for 22 years, plans to expand further in Eastern Europe. He said he may buy or open an injection mold-building plant in Europe and possibly elsewhere.

The firm became one of the few North American toolmakers in Poland four years ago when it bought mold maker ZPNP of Bydgoszcz, Poland. Until this year, Wentworth has been buying companies at a fast rate, expanding its plant numbers for blow molds, injection molds and thermoforming.

Last year, the company also purchased the PET preform assets of Electra Form Industries of Vandalia, Ohio. The company is turning around quickly and completing new products that had been in the works before the Wentworth purchase, said Mark Burrows, EFI general manager. EFI had entered liquidation before the sale to Wentworth.

With the new Polish facility, Wentworth will have 14 plants globally. Thermoforming has become a major growth area for the company, accounting for about 40 percent of its processing sales this year. The company expects to record more than US\$80 million in sales for 2001, with about US\$55 million of that in tooling, Kuskowski said.

The company has not made any major acquisitions in 2001, preferring to conserve its cash reserves for future expansion, Kuskowski said. But starting with the Polish plant, Wentworth plans to go on another buying spree to help double sales in several years, he said.

Yet, the events of Sept. 11 have affected the Ontario company. About a fifth of its work goes to the New York area, and some of that work was put on hold after the terrorist attack.

“We were picking up quite a bit of work in October,” Kuskowski said. “What happened there was terrible on a personal level, and I think business everywhere will take awhile to recover completely.”