

Innovative and sustainable solution from LANXESS:

Lightweight leather made easy

Leverkusen – X-Lite is the name of a new process from the LANXESS specialty chemicals company for producing lighter-weight, yet high-quality leather efficiently. “X-Lite enables tanners to turn even relatively thin grain splits into premium leather with a remarkably low weight per unit area, while still meeting thickness specifications. In particular, it satisfies the key requirements of car and aircraft manufacturers,” explains Dr. Marc Hombeck, head of New Business in LANXESS’ Leather business unit.

During the retannage, the leather is treated with a dispersion of expandable microcapsules that settle mainly in the more loosely structured parts of the corium. These microcapsules consist of a gas-tight, thermoplastic shell containing a pressurized liquid hydrocarbon. The leather is then heated, causing the microcapsules to expand to up to 40 times their original volume and fill any cavities and loosely structured areas permanently. The mechanically stable, expanded microcapsules have no adverse effect on subsequent process stages such as dry-drumming or finishing. The resultant leather has a soft and full handle and an attractive appearance, and weighs up to 20 percent less than a conventionally produced leather of the same thickness. “Our experts agree that leather produced using this technology is ideal for upholstering seats in aircraft and cars,” says Hombeck.

Lower weight is a particular advantage in means of transport such as cars and aircraft, as it cuts fuel consumption and thus increases the range – an important aspect not only in aviation, but also especially in the development of electric mobility on the road. In addition, innovations like X-Lite can help to reduce emissions of climate-damaging greenhouse gases and conserve natural resources. The reduction in the overall weight of vehicles also leads to lower CO₂

LANXESS AG

Contact: Ilona Kawan
Market Communications
Trade and Technical Press
51369 Leverkusen
Germany

Phone: +49 214 30-61684
Fax: +49 214 30-44865
Ilona.kawan@lanxess.com

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emissions. In this way, X-Lite is contributing to LANXESS' Sustainable Leather Management initiative.

Lighter weight also means greater comfort: "In handbags, for example, the advantages of lighter-weight leather are obvious," comments Hombeck.

X-Lite in detail

The X-Lite technology developed by LANXESS is based on a product, a modified retanning recipe and an expansion machine built in collaboration with the Italian machine manufacturers Fratelli CARLESSI SpA. It promises optimal utilization of thinly shaved grain leather, which is "filled out" during the retanning process, making it up to 20 percent thicker. At the same time, it offers an efficient way of reducing loose grain, which tanners say is becoming an increasing problem, especially in the belly and flanks. This applies even if the leather is subsequently laminated.

A thinner grain split automatically means a thicker flesh split, which can then be used for producing higher-quality goods. So, in addition to increasing the area yield of the grain split, X-Lite technology also improves the quality and value of the flesh split, and the entire production process becomes more efficient and more profitable.

Last but not least, leather treated with X-Lite has good structural stability, which in turn improves the performance properties. In particular bagging, which is especially undesirable on upholstery covers, can be reduced. And the microcapsule treatment does not impair either the water permeability or the water absorption.

The expansion machine developed jointly with CARLESSI is designed to cope with whole cattle hides and the large-scale production of automotive and aircraft leather. Pressureless steaming ensures uniform expansion and consequently uniform thickness of the leather over the entire area.

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News Release

The Leather business unit belongs to LANXESS' Performance Chemicals segment, which posted sales of EUR 2.2 billion in fiscal 2012.

LANXESS is a leading specialty chemicals company with sales of EUR 9.1 billion in 2012 and roughly 17,400 employees in 31 countries. The company is currently represented at 50 production sites worldwide. The core business of LANXESS is the development, manufacturing and marketing of plastics, rubber, intermediates and specialty chemicals. LANXESS is a member of the leading sustainability indices Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) World and FTSE4Good as well as the Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index (CDLI).

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