

Mathe Group and Van Dyck pump millions into KZN operations

Tyre recycler Mathe Group and Van Dyck, a manufacturer of recycled rubber flooring are staging a multi-million-rand "comeback" with multiple investments in their businesses in Hammarsdale, KwaZulu-Natal.



Mehran Zarrebini, Mathe Group and Van Dyck CEO. Source: Supplied

British investor and CEO of Mathe Group and Van Dyck, Dr Mehran Zarrebini, said the pandemic provided time to plan future expansions and put in place a strategy that will further consolidate the supply chain that links Mathe Group and Van Dyck, which are sister companies within the PFE International Group of companies.

Mathe Group recycles radial truck tyres to produce rubber crumb, while Van Dyck manufactures value-added products such as rubber flooring and paving for gyms, fitness areas and playgrounds as well as ballistic tiles, acoustic underlays and livestock mats from this raw material.

"It accelerated the need to change as a business and to pivot away from soft flooring and into the manufacture of sustainable rubber products," he explains.

To facilitate this, Van Dyck not only moved existing machinery for producing moulded goods from the south Durban factory that it sold in 2020, but also purchased and commissioned additional plants to increase output.

This was part of a broader strategy to ensure that the entire Hammarsdale operation is completely vertically aligned with both moulding and recycling done on the same premises.



Source: Supplied

Zarrebini explains that, up until then, the moulding division of Van Dyck was a much smaller focus of the overall business. It has been operating 24/7 as a standalone business since the beginning of 2022.

“We are coming from a lower base, so we have an opportunity to scale the business further which we are doing now. The new investment will more than double output. This means that we are using a lot of the rubber crumb generated by Mathe for our own internal purposes as well as selling it to external customers. This has created a slight capacity constraint on the recycling side,” he says.



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Growing recycling capacity

The businesses' next investment strategy phase will be to increase recycling capacity. Mathe's new machinery, which will be brought in from overseas, is expected to be commissioned within the next three months.

As one of South Africa's only remaining tyre recyclers, Mathe has also been running 24/7 since the beginning of 2022. It processes around 700 radial truck tyres per day, producing between 25 and 30 tons of rubber crumb. The additional equipment is expected to boost this to 45 tons per day and increase tyre usage to approximately 1 000 per day.

This is energy permitting, Dr Zarrebini cautions, adding that load shedding poses significant challenges to companies such as Mathe Group which relies on electricity to mechanically recycle tyres.

Mathe installed 980 x 570KW solar panels in October last year on its three buildings. “This produces up to half a megawatt per hour and ensures that we can use sustainable energy for more than half of our operational requirements, a first in South Africa and, possibly, in the world when it comes to tyre recycling.”

This forms part of a broader plan to manage energy usage to minimise disruptions from outages and enhance productivity.

“I believe that this is a very proactive way of tackling the energy crisis. We are a sustainable company, so it makes sense that we use energy sustainably as well,” he says.

Plans to add a second tyre recycling line in Hammarsdale are already well underway and at the EIA stage. This will create more jobs, the companies note. Mathe currently employs 100 people and Van Dyck a similar number with the majority of employees sourced from the surrounding Hammarsdale community.

Export business

Zarrebini says that exports of Van Dyck products to the United Kingdom have increased substantially over the past year with containers of gym tiles and acoustic cradles made from recycled South African tyres being regularly dispatched via the port of Durban. These products had, up until now, been sourced from China and Malaysia.

He notes that Van Dyck is also working closely with its UK customers to develop more innovative moulded rubber products and flooring solutions.

As the head of Mathe Group, he is also working closely with the South African Waste Bureau which has managed waste tyre recycling since October 2017 and is in the throes of revising the systems that are in place to supply used tyres to companies such as Mathe Group.

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