

# leaderlines

No. 1 • MAY 2001

## DSM Elastomers *the Experience*



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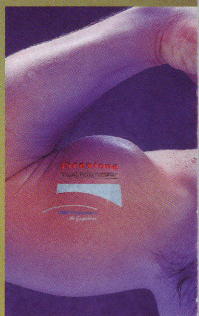
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# **DSM-Firestone alliance puts meat on the partnership bone**

**World leaders in EPDM and roofing products  
discuss unique relationship**

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Open any business text or corporate brochure today and you'll see the word 'partnership' scattered about as casually as birdseed before pigeons on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral. Yet Firestone Building Products, the foremost supplier of rubber roofing materials worldwide, and DSM Elastomers quite deliberately choose to characterize their business relationship with this ubiquitous phrase. These two industry leaders, moreover, are able to clearly define the slippery term as it applies to the long-term alliance they've forged.

**Partnership as commitment**

At the heart of the DSM Elastomers-Firestone alliance is a long-term contract, one of the longest Elastomers has ever had with a customer. Now in year two, the contract is about more than supplying and receiving a certain amount of product.

'The importance of the long-term contract is total commitment by both parties,' says Gary Brake, Division Manager of Purchasing for Firestone. 'There's absolutely no question about the commitment from Firestone to DSM or from DSM to Firestone. So, it gives us the ability to develop top-quality products and gives DSM the ability to invest in the equipment or processes they need to produce those products.'

**Partnership as access**

This commitment plays itself out in frequent, close contact between DSM Elastomers and Firestone. 'They give us a lot of access to their factory,' says Eddie James, Manager of Global EPDM R&D for DSM Elastomers, 'much more than some other companies. We actually spend quite a lot of time there.'

Firestone has its reasons for providing this entrée. 'Access to our factory helps DSM understand exactly what we need,' says Bill Barham, Manager of Technical Services and Development at Firestone's Arkansas Plant, 'from the packaging needs of the polymer to the processing needed for a good thorough mix. I think when DSM understands what we need it makes it a lot easier for them to design the polymers.'

Recently, for example, DSM worked closely with Firestone to lower viscosity in a fire-retardant compound. 'When you reduce combustibles, viscosity jumps dramatically,' explains Barham. 'The polymers that we had then were difficult to process because of this. After discussions with us, DSM came up with a polymer that was in the viscosity range we needed. It took some tweaking, but thanks to the partnership, we were able to develop a polymer that currently runs very well.'



**Firestone Building Products**

Firestone Building Products Company manufactures and markets a full line of roofing systems, insulation and accessory products for commercial roofing applications. Firestone has headquarters in Carmel, Indiana, and operates 12 manufacturing facilities in North America. It uses DSM polymers primarily in its flagship RubberGard® Roofing Systems. Firestone is DSM Elastomers' largest single customer volume account.





## Partnership as shared goals

The synergy between DSM and Firestone has deep roots, extending to shared core goals. 'Firestone Building Products is a good partner because it approaches its products from a continuous-improvement mindset,' says DSM's Eddie James. 'And they have encouraged DSM to do the same in providing the materials.'

Not that DSM Elastomers has needed all that much encouragement. This is how Patsy Garrett, Firestone's Materials Control Manager sees it. 'DSM has a very strong focus on the technical and service aspects of their polymers and they envision continuous improvements just as Firestone does. So there is an unending effort between DSM and the Firestone technical group to perfect polymers for these applications.'

Other shared goals include passionate commitment to quality and timely product development. 'Quality is important because we have to produce the weathering barrier for a building,' says Edward Kane, Technology Manager for Firestone. 'Less than optimum performance with the membrane causes immediate problems for our customers. So our customers depend on us to deliver consistent quality.'

'In our business, you also have to be expedient in accomplishing work. If you don't have people who know how to get to results efficiently it ends up costing too much time and effort'.

'We need sharp people who are efficient and have the resources that back them up to develop an effective polymer and we can count on DSM for that.'

## Partnership as mutual benefits

DSM Elastomers' Tom Bell, the Senior Technical Service Representative on the Firestone account, defines partnership as a relationship that delivers benefits to both sides. 'A true partnership allows both parties to focus on specific objectives, such as growing market share, improving profitability and lowering costs,' says Bell. 'Partnership promotes open communication and that allows problems and opportunities to be addressed in a timely fashion. This, of course, benefits both DSM and Firestone.'

The benefits of the partnership go beyond the key participants. According to James, 'Firestone Building Products continues to raise the performance bar for us. This benefits DSM with other products and other customers'.

'Specifically we've learned from the technology that we first employed in developing products for them. We've been able to spin that off in the deployment of other products. An example of that is Keltan® 6520Z. We were able to spin off the procedures we used in the technical development of this product into automotive products.'

## Partnership as give and take

Flexibility was also very important for Firestone when selecting a long-term partner. Once again, DSM Elastomers stepped up to the challenge. 'Floor space is very restricted at the Firestone complex in Arkansas where the sheeting is made,' explains Garrett. 'So we have to receive daily shipments that are precisely right and of such quality that we can use them in the production of our products every day. That requires very, very close co-ordination between the Firestone Purchasing Group and the technical and service groups of DSM, including customer service and shipping people.'

*'DSM has a very strong focus on the technical and service aspects of their polymers and they envision continuous improvements just as Firestone does. So there is an unending effort between DSM and the Firestone technical group to perfect polymers for these applications.'*

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**Patsy Garrett, Materials Control Manager for Firestone Building Products**

'We also have to make day-to-day changes, which have to be implemented almost immediately. It's hard for me to understand how the DSM Customer Services rep can cope with the level and degree of changes that Firestone needs, but she does an excellent job. They can start or stop shipments of a given product almost at the drop of a hat.'

## Partnership as results

The bottom line of any successful partnership is what kind of results it produces. Here, too, the Firestone-DSM alliance's proof is in the pudding. 'I would guess we're on our third generation of product with Firestone,' says Roger Lacallade, DSM Elastomers' Director of Sales for North America. 'Every couple of years we come in and make a new generation of product designed to better fulfill their requirements and their needs.'

'We couldn't do that by ourselves. That happens when you're focused on the same goals.'

*For more information about Firestone Building Products, see <http://www.firestonebpco.com>*