

Malaysian Rubber Economic and Technical Mission to France, Italy and Germany, 7th - 17th September 2005

The Malaysian Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, YB Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui, led an Economic and Technical Mission to France, Italy and Germany between 7th – 17th September 2005.

Three one-day meetings were held in Paris, Milan and Hamburg, focusing on business opportunities in the Malaysian rubber products manufacturing sector, including latex-dipped products, industrial and general rubber components and finished goods.

These events were organized jointly by the Malaysian Rubber Export Promotion Council (MREPC) and the UK research centre of the Malaysian Rubber Board (MRB), the Tun Abdul Razak Research Centre (TARRC), in collaboration with the Malaysian External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) and the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA).

In Paris and Milan, the Hon. Minister presented a keynote speech, outlining the advantages of doing business with Malaysia, which was followed by a seminar on 'Business Opportunities in the Malaysian Rubber Industry' and another on 'Selecting the right gloves'. In all venues, including Hamburg, the Mission delegates attended business meetings with distributors and other potential business partners. In Paris and Milan, the Minister held press conferences with prominent national economic newspapers, rubber industry magazines and a French radio station.

During the Mission the Minister was accompanied by three Ministry representatives, a senator and three state government representatives from Kedah and Perak, as well as eight companies from the rubber sector: Top Glove, Kumpulan Jebco, Kossan, MPol/Mardec, GMT, Kian Lee SMR and Green HPSP.

In France, the Hon. Minister and a party of Mission members visited the research centre of Hutchinson SA in Chalette-sur-Loing.. Another party visited PSA (Peugeot Citroën), in the Paris environs.

The Hon. Minister visited ENEA, Italy's National Agency for new technologies, energy and the environment, to see the Structural Dynamics and Vibration Control Laboratory at ENEA's Centro Ricerche Casaccia and witnessed shaking table tests of anti-seismic devices developed at TARRC. The Mission delegates visited CF Gomma SpA's factory on the outskirts of Turin.

Whilst in Germany, there was a Ministerial visit to Volkswagen Group in Wolfsburg, after which the main party proceeded to Berlin for the palm oil programme, separately arranged by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board.

The Seminars entitled '**Malaysia-France / Malaysia-Italy Business Opportunities in the Malaysian Rubber Industry**' commenced with a talk on 'Business and investment Opportunities in Malaysia' by representatives of the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, MIDA (www.mida.gov.my). This was followed by a presentation entitled 'Your investment and outsourcing route to the Malaysian Rubber Industry' by Dr Barry Evans of the Malaysian Rubber Board's UK research centre, TARRC (www.tarrc.co.uk) and 'Technical Support for the Malaysian Rubber Industry', highlighting the MRB's facilities in Malaysia and the UK, by Dr Andrew Tinker, TARRC's Director of Research.

The sessions on '**Selecting the right gloves**' covered similar ground to the events held earlier in the year in the UK and Australia.

Dr Henning Allmers, described the German experience of successfully tackling the issue of latex protein allergy, through the change from powdered to powder-free latex gloves, from his perspective as Director of the Department of Occupational Medicine, and head of the Occupational Medicine Laboratory at the Department of Dermatology, Environmental Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Osnabrück in Germany.

Dato' Ong Eng Long, Deputy CEO of the Malaysian Rubber Export Promotion Council (MREPC) and former Deputy Director General (R&D) of the Malaysian Rubber Board, summarized the key issues in glove selection in the healthcare setting under the heading 'the right gloves for the right job' and compared the performance of natural rubber latex gloves with those of other materials.

Professor Pascal Demoly, is a chest physician, allergologist and head of the clinical department of allergology at the University Hospital of Montpellier. He spoke about the use of latex gloves in France and incidence of related allergy, in particular describing the experience of his own hospital which has successfully introduced a powder-free latex glove policy and reduced the incidence of clinical signs of latex allergy. There are, as yet, no national guidelines for natural rubber latex glove use in France.

Dr Francesca Larese Filon is the Chief Physician at the Allergy Unit at the Department of Sciences of Environmental Medicine, Sector of Occupational Medicine, at the University of Trieste in Italy. She described the work undertaken over the past ten years to prevent glove related allergic reactions and the results of a five year followup study after successful introduction of powder-free gloves. Guidelines which require the use of powder-free latex gloves have been introduced in the Venezia region of Italy and other regions are expected to adopt similar policies.

Dr Abu bin Amu, Director of the Technology and Engineering Division at the Malaysian Rubber Board, described the continuous improvements in latex medical gloves taking place in Malaysia. In particular, he explained how Malaysia's exports of natural rubber latex examination gloves are monitored and benchmarked by the accredited laboratory of the Rubber Research

Institute of Malaysia for quality, consistency and reliability and demonstrated how gloves produced under the Standard Malaysian Glove (SMG) programme comply with or indeed exceed current European and US regulatory requirements.