



PRO BITUMEN & PBBs: RECAP AND OUTLOOK

SIBUR and Gazprom Neft held the PRO Bitumen & PBBs cross-industry conference.

The quality and safety of roads depend on the materials and technologies used to build them. For several years now, SIBUR and Gazprom Neft have been holding PRO Bitumen & PBBs, a cross-industry conference where market players discuss topical industry issues, such as better-quality materials, new solutions and the future of the industry. The event is supported by the Federal Road Agency and Russian Highways; Rosneft Bitumen is also a partner.

“Our work to raise the bar for the quality of Russian roads is rooted in scientific expertise; many of the decisions we make are forward-looking, setting the pace for the future of the road-building industry,” said Dmitry Orlov, CEO of Gazpromneft Bitumen Materials.

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Over the past nine years, more than 65 of the conference’s resolutions have been put into action, which has contributed to higher-quality bitumen and polymer-bitumen binders (PBBs), stronger regulatory documents and standards, the testing of new products and the development of cutting-edge technologies. A further result of many years of cooperation is a growth in the use of innovative PBBs. In 2020, their share in the total volume of bitumen produced in Russia stood at 9.9%, with SIBUR making a serious contribution to the growth in PBB production.

“The size of the market for thermoplastic elastomers (TPEs), which are used to produce PBBs for road building, has increased by more than 1.5 times in the past five years. With the launch of our new TPE-100 production facility, SIBUR has ramped up its total TPE capacity to 135 ktpa,” commented Alexander Petrov, Member of the Management Board – Managing Director, Plastics, Elastomers and Organic Synthesis Division, SIBUR’s Production Support Function. “Our TPE product portfolio has expanded to encompass new grades, including those used to produce Superpave performance grade (PG) bitumen, as well as bitumen sealants, mastics and road markings. PBBs lengthen the time between repairs for Russian federal highways – up to 12 years for improved coating roads and up to 24 years for complete resurfacing, increasing the roads’ resistance to cracking, heat, shearing, water and frost.”

According to the Road Policy Department of the Russian Ministry of Transport, 2,300 km of federal and regional highways were opened and 20,300 km were repaired under state projects in 2020. Comparable amounts will be completed by 2021-end, which will require around 4 million tonnes of bitumen. According to preliminary estimates, total demand for bitumen to 2024 will reach 15.4 million tonnes.

One of the key decisions resulting from the conference was the proposal to create a cross-government working group involving the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Energy, which will investigate whether bitumen binders can be produced from high-viscosity oil. Work to develop recommendations for maintaining bitumen material quality for use in road and rail transport, to set evaluation criteria for road-building material test laboratories and pricing for bitumen binders and asphalt concrete testing is ongoing.

The conference was a hybrid event, and a range of services were developed to make the online audience feel more comfortable. One of the digital highlights of PRO Bitumen & PBBs was a videoconference with the Innovative Highway Repair & Maintenance Technology conference in Omsk. The videoconference brought together more than 700 representatives of state regulators, road-building organisations, manufacturers and consumers of bitumen binders while keeping an open floor for discussion. Industry representatives from Austria, Sweden and Israel were also in attendance and spoke at the conference.