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ENDLESS INNOVATION

FROM THIS WORLDWIDE LEADER IN RELEASE AGENTS



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Chem-Trend is a global leader in mold release agents, casting lubricants, purging compounds, mold cleaners, and process chemical specialties for customers in a broad range of industries. But while the performance of these products is the company's claim to fame, it's how the business operates that is truly worthy of praise.

Comparable to the coating on parchment paper or release liners for labels, Chem-Trend release agents, lubricants, and compounds are a vital part of the modern manufacturing process. Through their varying chemistries, they help reduce waste, improve workflow, and strengthen output and product quality while reducing costs and impact on the environment.

This is possible only because of the culture of innovation that has been nurtured, the processes that have been optimized, and the emphasis on people and the environment that has been fostered at Chem-Trend throughout the years, as well as a commitment to meeting (and anticipating) its customers' needs.

According to CEO John Lundin, "Customers can rely on us to reduce their costs and to deliver the kind of technology that they're looking for today, but also the things that they don't even know they need yet. It's those kinds of savings and looking at their employees and saying, 'wow, we just made your life better; it smells better, it works better, it's easier.' And we do that in all of our segments. That's what we're known for." ►

› Culture of innovation

From its founding in Howell, Michigan where it remains headquartered to this day, to 19 global locations including seven research and development and eight manufacturing locations around the world, Chem-Trend's evolution has been remarkable.

The company was founded through the entrepreneurial vision and innovative spirit of founder Peer Lorentzen, a chemical engineer, and his wife Birgit, a chemist who crafted a revolutionary product in the comfort of their home's kitchen.

At the time, the automotive industry was shifting production of some of their components to aluminum die casted parts and the couple saw an opportunity to create a new, water-based, release agent that would improve many aspects of the manufacturing process. To get the word out, the Lorentzens sent sample jars of their new product to manufacturers in the region hoping to get a bite. And that they did. The effort caught the attention of one of Michigan's Big Three and they had to quickly pivot to meet the sudden growing demand.

From one order for five gallons to a second order of 150 five-gallon pails, their product, one application at a time, continued to answer the call of manufacturers looking for solutions to burgeoning issues with materials and applications that were being introduced.

Today, Chem-Trend's next-generation technologies are specifically formulated to support composites, die casting, friction, paper impregnation, polyurethane, rotational molding, rubber, thermoplastics, tires, and wood composite applications around the world, and the company continues to push the limits of what is possible.

Doing better by being better

The invention of a water-based product eliminated the need for solvent-based products in many applications, and minimized the slippery mess left by the vapor that resulted when oil-based products hit the hot press. Chem-Trend's water-based release agent improved working conditions, performance, output, and the bottom line for its growing list of clients, while also improving the company's environmental record without the call of regulators to do so.

"Sustainability is a leading factor in our development process, starting with raw material sourcing. Making sure we're using the most environmentally conscious materials for our solutions is the goal. Water-based solutions continue to dominate our global portfolio of products at 80 percent and we see this only continuing to grow," says Vice President of Marketing and Technology, Amanda Pugh.

Chem-Trend is taking this environmental commitment a step further by eliminating per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) within its global heritage portfolio. Once again, these efforts have preceded the call of regulators to do so.

As Pugh notes, "Our road map wasn't just to be sustainable for the sake of it... we have better products that go along with that effort. So, when we think about sustainability, we're not just thinking about reducing our CO₂ footprint—of course, that's important—but we also want to make [the industry] better, and we want to give our customers better choices."

Chem-Trend has succeeded in eliminating PFAS from its solutions as of 2023 and continues to innovate with its non-PFAS product alternatives. The company works with its own suppliers to ensure that unwanted chemicals are excluded from its portfolio for the benefit of its people, its processes, and the environment.





Sustainability starts with innovation

At Chem-Trend, the teams throughout its many divisions worldwide are looking long-term at how they can remain at the leading edge of product development, sustainability, and performance.

“For us, when we look at sustainability, we think innovation: we want to make it better, we want to make it faster, we want to improve it. It’s not just about being sustainable; if I’m going to put a product out there that our team is saying is sustainable, it’s also going to be better,” says Pugh.

Backed by the investments and support of the company’s leadership, Chem-Trend continues to set the pace in the market by developing its own chemistries to meet the highly specific needs of each sector it serves. It does this by understanding its customers’ processes and applications through a hands-on approach.

“Our work is best done on the shop floors around the world—really understanding what the customer is trying to do, what they’re using, their industry, what they’re trying to achieve, and then developing specific formulations that help them produce and do so efficiently,” Lundin explains.

Pugh adds, “We look at the materials and the chemistries that go into our products, but coupled with that are the processes

that our customer uses, which dictate what type of chemistry we use, what variables they have, how hot the press is, what the geometry is, what materials they’re molding, what chemistries *they’re* using.”

Even when Chem-Trend cannot physically be on its customers’ shop floors, the company has invested in digitization that improves the user experience wherever they are, in the form of DilutionIQ™ and SprayIQ™, digital devices that have revolutionized how customers operate.

Referring to the processes, Pugh notes, “DilutionIQ™ is for concentrates, and SprayIQ™ is for products that are sprayed. They help our customers better control how much product is applied to the mold, where they spray it on the mold, and it gives them a nice visual to be able to control the process remotely. So we’re venturing into the digitalization space.”

Other efforts are being made to improve the speed and agility of customer access to product resources and information, establish an online shop for existing customers for quick reordering, and offer more at-your-fingertips offerings. These offerings include improved visibility into customer accounts, orders, product data sheets, and other digital training tools and resources that will heighten the user experience. ►►

► Champion of people and environment

Chem-Trend's approach to sustainability is two-fold, as Lundin highlights: "One aspect is reducing our footprint. We look at how our operations can be more efficient while still developing solutions that are proven to positively impact our customers' processes. This second part is what we call maximizing our handprint. We make a point of educating our customers on the areas where they can see sustainability gains and how we can help."

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At the same time, the company is working to quantify its carbon footprint from a manufacturing and product standpoint, to better understand where it currently stands as well as where reductions can be made in the future.

"We're working today to better understand what that looks like and target reductions in that space, too; from the materials we use to the transportation that we use, the energy that we can save by making our customers' processes more efficient—all of that will be encompassed as well," Pugh explains.

The company's sustainability efforts were validated last year when it achieved EcoVadis Gold rating, placing in the top five percent of all rated chemical companies who were evaluated on the grounds of sustainability, procurement, environment, ethics, labor, and human rights. And it doesn't stop there; together with its parent company, Freudenberg Group, Chem-Trend's goal is climate neutrality by 2045: a lofty goal, but one that is in sight because of Chem-Trend's unending commitment to innovation.

Chem-Trend has been under the ownership of Freudenberg Group since 2004, and it has proven a highly compatible marriage that has afforded the company greater capacity and scope to maximize the value of its operations and charitable outreach on a greater scale across its ever-expanding global presence.





Living its values

Lundin's take on what the relationship with Freudenberg brings is enlightening: "It's a family-owned, values-based technology company that's spread out all over the world with 50,000-plus employees. They're very tight to their values and their guiding principles, which fit very closely with the direction and the values that Chem-Trend has always had, but Freudenberg adds size and scope and scale that have been remarkably helpful."

This is echoed by Global Director of Human Resources, Nicole Mason, who says, "We have this very strong global community that's focused on collaboration cross-regionally: we're well connected, very collaborative, making sure that we're sharing best practices around the regions."

So, despite its growth, Chem-Trend continues to live its values, which makes it a great industrial partner as well as an invaluable member of the communities within which it operates around the world. Chem-Trend contributes to countless causes that are meaningful to the regions it serves, from women's shelters to improved access to education and leadership development.

Looking ahead, and empowered by exceptional processes and standards, the team at Chem-Trend remains laser-focused on innovation to keep bringing the finest products in its sector to the market: to be the best by doing its best in every way. ■





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