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Sumitomo Chemical to Expand Production Capacity for Polyethersulfone (PES)

Sumitomo Chemical today announced plans to expand production capacity for polyethersulfone (PES) at its Ehime Works in Shikoku, Japan. Sumitomo Chemical's Ehime plant currently produces 2,500 tons of PES annually, and construction has already begun to expand capacity to 3,000 tons annually. Sumitomo Chemical completed a capacity expansion for the production of PES from an annual 2,000 tons to 2,500 tons in July of this year, and brought the plant on stream. However, due to a rapid increase in demand, particularly for aircraft applications, Sumitomo Chemical has decided to undertake this latest expansion of its production capacity with a focus on special grades for these applications in order to meet the increasing demand from its customers from 2007 onward.

PES is a super engineering plastic that exhibits a number of outstanding properties such as light weight, heat resistance, strength and transparency, and is used for electronics components and membranes, as well as carbon fiber composites and a wide range of other materials that require these special properties. Among these uses, carbon fiber composites for aircraft applications are finding use in a broader range of components equivalent to as much as 3-4 times the amount conventionally used per aircraft, as the industry seeks to reduce fuel consumption by lightweighting aircraft. As this trend gains momentum, demand for PES used in carbon fiber composites is seeing rapid growth. Sumitomo Chemical is currently the only manufacturer worldwide to have received approval from major aircraft manufacturers for this special grade of PES for use in aircraft applications, and therefore decided to undertake this latest capacity expansion in order to meet the increasing demand from its customers.

The expanded facilities are scheduled for completion in June 2007, after which production capacity for special grade PES suitable for aircraft applications will be 1,000 tons per year, which is anticipated to meet demand up to 2010.

Sumitomo Chemical also plans to develop the market for applications outside the aircraft industry going forward to grow its super engineering plastics business with its PES operations as one of the cornerstones.