

Much more than a formulator of resins and hardeners

Drawing on its rich experience acquired in the boating sector – a sector that is extremely rough on materials – Sicomin continues to progress not only from a technical viewpoint via new solutions, but also sales-wise.

When it started out in 1946, Sicomin was a distributor of organic chemicals (including fatty acids) in France and, until the 1980s, represented some of the Unilever group's plants. At the instigation of Philippe Marcovich, the current owner and President, son of Sicomin founder Charles Marcovich, Sicomin created a composite department in 1983. Philippe had a passion for sailing and new materials. He began distributing composite materials and recruited a chemist to make specialty epoxies.

Thanks to the success of the new department, Sicomin was able to open a plant and laboratory in 1985 at Châteauneuf-les-Martigues, near Marseille, eventually becoming a well-known player in the epoxy-resin and composite-material market. In 2007, Sicomin expanded the plant, while its site in Brittany started expanding its local services for customers along the French Atlantic coast. In 2014, to meet the demands of its growing business in France and for export, Sicomin undertook to increase its production capacity with a new construction project of 7,000 square meters of buildings.

Boating: a full-size test laboratory

"Boatbuilding is a fast, full-size laboratory. If a product doesn't perform well, you rapidly reach the limits," said Gilles Romigou, the regional director of Sicomin's Breton division. (It is true that compared to many other sectors, the corrosive saline environment of the oceans seems more like a torture bench: a single transatlantic crossing can subject a boat hull to millions of load cycles.) A great boatbuilding enthusiast, he started out in sailboard manufacturing and went on to participate in a number of projects, with

30 years of experience in racing boats like Jet Service, Macif and Groupama. When Philippe Marcovich set up Sicomin Composites in the early 1980s, Gilles immediately became involved in the boatbuilding aspect, due to his interest and his experience in composites for sailboards. Those were the years when France started its lead in Oceangoing competition, developing giant sailing multihulls.

With its knowledge of the environment, sailors, materials and structural loads, Sicomin has a real boatbuilding culture. According to Gilles Romigou, customers

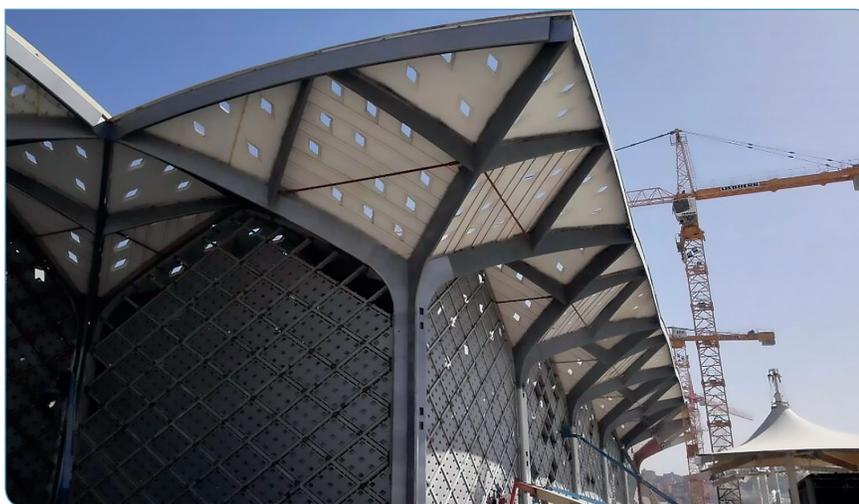


Fig. 1: Sicomin was a key supplier of fire-retardant epoxy resins and coating for 3 out of 4 of the Haramain high-speed railway stations, KSA

come to Sicomin because of that and its experience in composite technologies. One of the latest examples is Ocean Eagle 43, a trimaran commissioned by the government of Mozambique for maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean, where lightweight construction is key to the boat's rapid acceleration and long-range fuel efficiency. Sicomin has applied this capital successfully to other sectors like aerospace, defence, renewable energy, sports and civil engineering. Spurred on by its President Philippe Marcovich, the company has given itself the means to develop internationally as well. Sicomin epoxy systems cover a number of processes: infusion, RTM, pultrusion, hand lay-up, and on-site prepregging.

Cutting-edge products

Among Sicomin's latest products for the many sectors where it operates are a range of fire-resistant products, a transparent, UV-resistant topcoat, and a range of biosourced resins. In the fire-resistant range, its fire retardant infusion system SR1125 is an halogen free formulation with no filtration of intumescent agents in the fabrics. The sectors such as construction, railway and marine are currently testing it (figure 1). Top Clear is a high-gloss translucent brushable and sprayable system that was developed for the surfing industry. The system is highly UV resistant and has very good capacity to fill carbon pinholes. Top Clear has an high surface tension, fast hardening with no sagging effect. Only 1 or 2 coats are required unlike conventional PU varnishes, dramatically reducing process cycle. GreenPoxy® is the brand for Sicomin



Fig. 2. Nidecker snowboard in action

epoxy system containing up to 51% bio-based carbon (ASTM D6866 certified by an independent laboratory). Sicomin takes environmental concerns very seriously. Nidecker chose GreenPoxy® for one of its snowboards (figure 2). In years to come, a 100% bio-based epoxy resin formulation is foreseeable.

From retail to wholesale

Sicomin's management remembers how difficult it is for connoisseurs to find quality products. For that reason, the company continues to sell retail, from its online store and directly at the production site near Marseille or the warehouse in Brittany. This approach is part of its corporate DNA, and it is paying off as the website's sales have increased 30% each year since it was created. The invoices Sicomin processes range anywhere from € 20 to € 2 million, for standard

or customized formulations. Customer technical support is a corporate value.

Aiming for strong growth

Sicomin now employs 55 people (45 at a 7,000-sq-metre production site near Marseille which includes a team of 7 in a state of the art laboratory and 10 in Brittany for warehousing and distribution). Sicomin is recruiting more sales-force to keep offering the best service to its growing demands with the now reached production capacity of 20,000 metric tons. Its global distribution network should be of help (70% of the epoxy production is exported), as should its R&D activities, to which more than 5% of turnover per year is devoted. ■

More information:
www.sicomin.com

Sicomin will exhibit at JEC World 2016
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