

MARKET NEWSLETTER

CHEMICAL WEEK February 18, 1970

Conoco is pushing its dispersible alumina, Dispal, toward full commerciality. The company's Petrochemical Dept. has posted a new bulk price—28¢/lb. in 40,000-lb. bagged lots—that's 72% less than its previous developmental tab. and well below (46-74%, depending on the dry weight content) the premium-priced colloidal aluminas and silicas with which it will compete. Conoco also set prices of smaller lots, ranging from 40¢/lb. (ninety 55-lb. drums and over) to 70¢/lb. (one to four drums). And it has beefed up inventories at Paterson, N.J., is now prepared to sell multimillion-pound lots.

The Dispal price cut is aimed squarely at opening up volume markets. Colloidal silicas and aluminas now share a 20-million-lbs./year market, which the silicas strongly dominate. Conoco hopes its product will help double the market within five years.

Carpeting is an initial market target. A 10% dispersion, applied at the rate of 1-2 oz./sq. yd., is claimed to provide a season's antistatic protection. The product can also be formulated into aerosol rug shampoos; the alumina is said to solve the rapid-resoil problem. Dispal dispersions, blended with a small percent of acrylic emulsion, are also expected to find a big market as antisoilers for vinyl-coated wallpaper.

The paper industry also shapes up as a major market. The positive charge on the colloidal alumina helps coagulate paper pitch and other negatively charged particles into an easily removed floc. Conoco also hopes to develop substantial sales volume in sewage and waste-water treatment where the alumina may exhibit synergistic effects with other treatment chemicals.

Thixotropic properties of colloidal alumina may open substantial markets in protective coatings. The chemical is now being used as a thickener in cosmetic creams. Conoco also expects to sell some as a nonslip additive and to produce agents that convert hydrophobic surfaces into hydrophilic surfaces. Interior dishwasher surfaces are now treated with alumina to improve wettability.

Conoco now produces Dispal in its West German linear alcohols plant, where the alumina is produced by water hydrolysis of aluminum alkoxides. Conoco's U.S. alcohols plant uses a sulfuric acid hydrolysis, which gives alum as the by-product.

Proposed Canadian legislation to ban phosphate from detergents may be unenforceable, says Canadian Energy and Resources Minister J.J. Greene. He also advised a House of Commons' Resources Committee that the government was also powerless to enforce a reduction in phosphate detergent content, although he believes it could amend the criminal codes to make production of phosphate detergent a crime. Whether such action would pass a test of its constitutionality, he added, was debatable. Legislation to ban phosphates entirely by '73 and to force a reduction in content by mid-'70 is slated to be introduced soon in the House.

Washington, says Greene, has agreed on a joint program to eliminate phos-

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phate detergents. In Canada, the government is planning conferences with provincial pollution control officials to set up a phosphate replacement plan and controls (see *Washington Newsletter*, p. 23).

A major Swedish detergent maker is calling it quits on enzyme products.

Ab Helios Kemisk-Tekniska Fabriker, a cooperatively owned producer, is using newspaper ads to tell consumers that it is discontinuing production and sale of enzyme-containing presoaks to insure "security for our workers . . . and consumers." The largest Swedish detergent maker, Unilever's Sunlight affiliate, will continue to offer presoaks and enzyme-fortified detergents. Helios reported that plant workers risked an asthma-like illness unless properly protected. And the firm noted that enzyme effects on consumers were unknown. Helios claims that enzymes work on only 1% of soil in clothes and that much of that dirt washes out without enzymes.

Higher prices of silicone rubber compounds have been posted by Stauffer-Wacker Silicones. The boosts range from 10-50¢/lb. on products selling for \$2.50-3.50/lb. Average increase: 10%. The hikes apply to special-purpose, heat-curable stocks.

Selective increases in prices of salt will be made by Diamond Crystal, effective Apr. 1. Prices of many industrial grades will be upped 6¢/cwt., while premium and specialty salt grades will be hiked 7.5-11¢/cwt. The increases range from 2% to 7%, says Diamond, average out to 3.9%. Prices of chemical-grade salt, however, were not increased, since they were raised \$1/ton six months ago, to \$4.70/ton in bulk.

Du Pont's polyethylene packaging film price increase will take effect Feb. 23 and not "retroactively to Feb 3" as reported (*CW Market Newsletter*, Feb. 11).

Production cutbacks caused by the Vietnam War phase-down will be felt most by ordnance, according to a new job study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Ordnance—primarily ammunition manufacturing—accounts for 42% of 1.4 million war-created jobs. Layoffs are expected to accelerate sharply in coming months. The chemical process industries account for over 17% of war-generated employment.

A proposed ban on 2,4,5-T has fizzled. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, which originally planned to curtail use of the herbicide this year, is now studying a 2,4,5-T contaminant—tetrachlorodibenzo-*para*-dioxin—which USDA thinks may also be in 16 other herbicides that are also under scrutiny. The studies could lead to herbicide seizures if they contain over 1 ppm. of the contaminant, which has caused birth deformities in mice at higher concentration levels. The herbicides under investigation are all polychlorophenols. Failure of the Food and Drug Administration to act on 2,4,5-T prompted USDA to forego its proposed ban.