

Better understanding yields better tempering

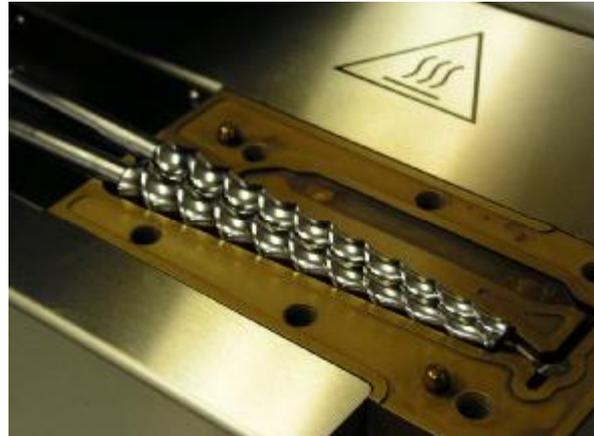


Behind the modest front of a commercial building in Sittard (The Netherlands) resides Anatech, developer and manufacturer of complex end-products sold worldwide. With 22 employees, this company puts instruments for laboratories on

the market, finding their way to pharmaceutical companies and large plastic producers.

'We perform the assembling ourselves. The rest we contract out.' tells Anatech's president Archi Leenaers. Having the advantage of being able to apply many technologies without having them within the firm.

But, subcontracting can be hard sometimes, he has experienced. 'One of our products is a small extruder, an instrument able to mix very small amounts of polymers with additives, influencing the property profile of the plastic. Especially where very small amounts are necessary, i.e. where only little material is available or it is extremely expensive, this is an important technique', Leenaers explains.



Using the extruder in combination with very tough, e.g. glass fibre filled, compounds however caused sometimes scratches in the barrel. 'The barrel is the massive metal housing in which the mixing process occurs. Some of these barrels appeared to be less tempered than others.' Anatech subcontracted the manufacturing of these barrels to a supplier, who on its turn subcontracted the tempering. 'We needed more knowledge on the tempering process in order to improve communication with our suppliers', Leenaers voices. Through LIOF (www.liof.nl), he then came into contact with the "Wetenschappelijk en Technisch Centrum van de Metaalverwerkende Nijverheid (WTM)" in Diepenbeek (Belgium) (www.wtcm.be).



'We analyzed the tempering problem of Anatech and its suppliers in practice', Marc Van Stappen of this Belgium institute explains. 'Our investigation revealed that the tempering process was performed under conditions far from optimal. The tempering process occurred in a large oven, in the presence of other pieces needing other tempering demands. If these demands diverged too much, the barrels were tempered poorly.' Though the exact details of the process are not made public, it is obvious that the tempering process was subsequently improved: 'The process is simplified in a way that the exact placement of the barrels in the oven is far less important.' To be able to communicate this improved method to its suppliers, Anatech needed to have a good in-depth understanding this solution, Leenaers underlines. 'That's why WTCM has transferred base knowledge on various tempering processes not only to the people of Anatech, but also to the supplier of the barrels.'

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