

SECURITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY TO THE EUROPEAN GLASS FIBRE INDUSTRY

A continuous industrial process requiring continuous energy supply

The European Commission announced in its Communication “RePowerEU” its desire to reduce by the end of the year the European Union dependency on Russian fossil fuel imports, while Russia provides over 40% of the total EU’s gas consumption. Under this background, it is logical that the authorities are investigating the consumers’ ability to switch to alternative energy sources and/or to reduce energy demand. **The present one pager intends to inform the authorities on the critical need for an uninterrupted supply of energy (natural gas and electricity) to the continuous filament glass fibre manufacturing sector to preserve the furnace and industrial equipment, prevent industrial accidents and protect the safety of workers.**

The cornerstones of the glass fibre industry are the glass melting furnaces that operate at high temperature (approximately 1500°C). While many manufacturing processes are well suited to intermittent operation, continuous filament glass fibre manufacturing requires steady state, continuous operation to keep the glass melted. A glass melting furnace requires being continuously fed with raw materials and supplied with energy. Cutting or limiting the energy supply to save energy are not viable options for the glass fibre sector.

Cutting the energy supply, even temporarily, to a glass fibre installation would irreversibly damage the industrial equipment. Shall an interruption occur for more than a few hours (20 hours), the furnace temperature drops, the molten glass solidifies, cracks appear in the furnace with the associated risk of glass leakages and injuries to the employees. To restart, it is imperative to repair or rebuilt the glass melting furnace with lead times of 6 to 12 months, at a minimum in normal times. The economic and social impact of such a situation would not only be dramatic to the glass fibre sector, but it would also have a cascading effect on all the glass reinforced plastic or composite material supply chains (transport, construction, renewables, electric and electronic devices, etc.).

Temporarily limiting the manufacturing activity by keeping the melted glass warm (‘hot hold’) is not fit for purpose either, since the energy savings would be at best marginal. Stopping production while maintaining the furnace temperature is a complex industrial operation. It consists of gradually reducing the raw materials input and lowering the glass temperature to maintain it a minimum 1200°C (to keep the glass molten). Although this operation is technically possible, it requires long time planning, it causes damages to the industrial equipment (in particular the bushings), and it generates substantial costs and losses in production, without guaranteeing the energy savings. In practice, the additional energy consumption required to restore the glass temperature at the production levels (1350°C) could offset the savings.

For the above reasons, **Glass Fibre Europe calls on the authorities to include in the energy contingency plans the continuous supply of energy to the Continuous Filament Glass Fibre installations and to consult the manufacturers in case of potential energy shortages.**

About Glass Fibre Europe – EU Transparency Register n°635608817518-09.

Glass Fibre Europe, founded in 1987, is the voice of the European continuous filament glass fibre industry. It is composed of 7 companies: 3B the fibreglass company, FYSOL SAS, Johns Manville, Lanxess, Nippon Electric Glass, Owens Corning and Saint-Gobain Vetrotex. Glass Fibre Europe represents over 90% of the continuous filament glass fibre production in Europe.

Glass Fibre Europe

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