

Industriepark Oberbruch: A Place for Technology-Based Processing Companies

A positive economic climate is attracting companies to settle in this international region

By Petronella Gerards



The power station

Industriepark Oberbruch reflects an interesting concept in current investment philosophies for chemical companies expanding to Europe. It's a center for companies engaged in leading future technologies such as innovative new materials (e.g., carbon fibers) and fuel cells. It's located in Heinsberg in the triangle formed by the cities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, and Aachen in the German-Belgian-Dutch border region. A skilled workforce is available for such new applications because the area is the birthplace of the German synthetic chemical fibers industry.

The Oberbruch location underwent major structural changes in the 1990s. The former parent company, Akzo Nobel, subsidized development of the site and converted it from a proprietary plant to an accessible industrial park with no public funding. Industriepark Oberbruch now houses 20 independent high-tech companies, most of which are involved in the chemical industry. Since 2000, it has been managed by Nuon Energie und Services GmbH, the only power company in Europe to own and operate industrial and chemical parks.



An exhaust stack at the power station

A positive political/business climate is attracting companies to settle in the region, and falling corporate taxes is improving the opportunities for investments.

Corporate income tax rates of around 25 percent on retained profits from publicly owned corporations are lower than those in Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Japan. In addition, the corporate income tax in Germany will decrease to 15 percent in 2008.

Management of an industrial park involves offering a variety of services, thus enabling tenant companies to focus on their special areas of expertise. These range from complete supplies of energy and water, waste disposal, quality control, environmental protection, safety, and logistics to staffing services and location development for enterprises in the park. The Nuon location management team also offers help with official permitting approval procedures for construction projects.



The building that houses the Tenax fiber production facility

The capital-intensive chemicals industry is the leading industrial sector in North Rhine-Westphalia with annual sales of more than 45 billion Euros followed by mechanical engineering and electrical/electronic engineering. Global players on the chemicals market that have their headquarters here include Bayer AG, Degussa AG, Dynamit Nobel, and Henkel KgaA. Plus, the chemicals industry traditionally is well accepted by the population throughout the state.

There are 2,000 employees working in the industrial park, making it the region's largest industrial employer. It's also an international environment. In addition, thanks to various links with Aachen University, the industrial park is regarded as an extended workbench for the Aachen Research and Technology Region. Production-oriented startups can find temporary support as needed, stemming from the close co-operation with RWTH Aachen, one of the world's leading technology universities.



Industriepark Oberbruch's headquarters

Logistics services at Oberbruch include warehousing, operations planning, dispatching, material management, and separate railway sidings. The logistics infrastructure of North Rhine-Westphalia includes 1,400 miles of motorways with the majority of them being six-lane. The state has seven international airports with more than 330 direct flights worldwide. There are 180 river ports with Duisburg considered Europe's largest inland port. With 678 railway stations, around 300 million passengers, and direct links to the international high-speed train network, rail traffic is also extremely well represented.

Manpower supply services support companies in staff management even including wage negotiations. The most current information and communication systems are available. This is supported by access to a skilled and motivated workforce, further contributing to the success of new enterprises.

An increasing demand for lightweight high-performance composite materials and renewable energies have encouraged the founding of a competence center for process chemicals and new materials in Industriepark Oberbruch. The site houses Europe's biggest producer of carbon fibers, Toho Tenax Europe, a subsidiary of the Japanese Teijin Ltd., and the first production line of the Australian-based Ceramic Fuel Cell Ltd. for small-scale, on-site micro-combined heat and power (m-CHP) and distributed generation units that co-generate electricity and heat for domestic use. Research experts anticipate that demand for carbon fibers application will double in the next several years. This forecast and the demand for high-performance new materials were key to the establishment of the competence center.

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