

IMAL PAL GROUP SEES OSB INDUSTRY INVESTMENT GROWTH

WBPI's annual Focus on Italy feature kicked off by talking to Modena-based wood-based panels plant supplier IMAL PAL Group. CEO Loris Zanasi updated Stephen Powney with company developments and how equipment supply to the panels industry has progressed through the pandemic

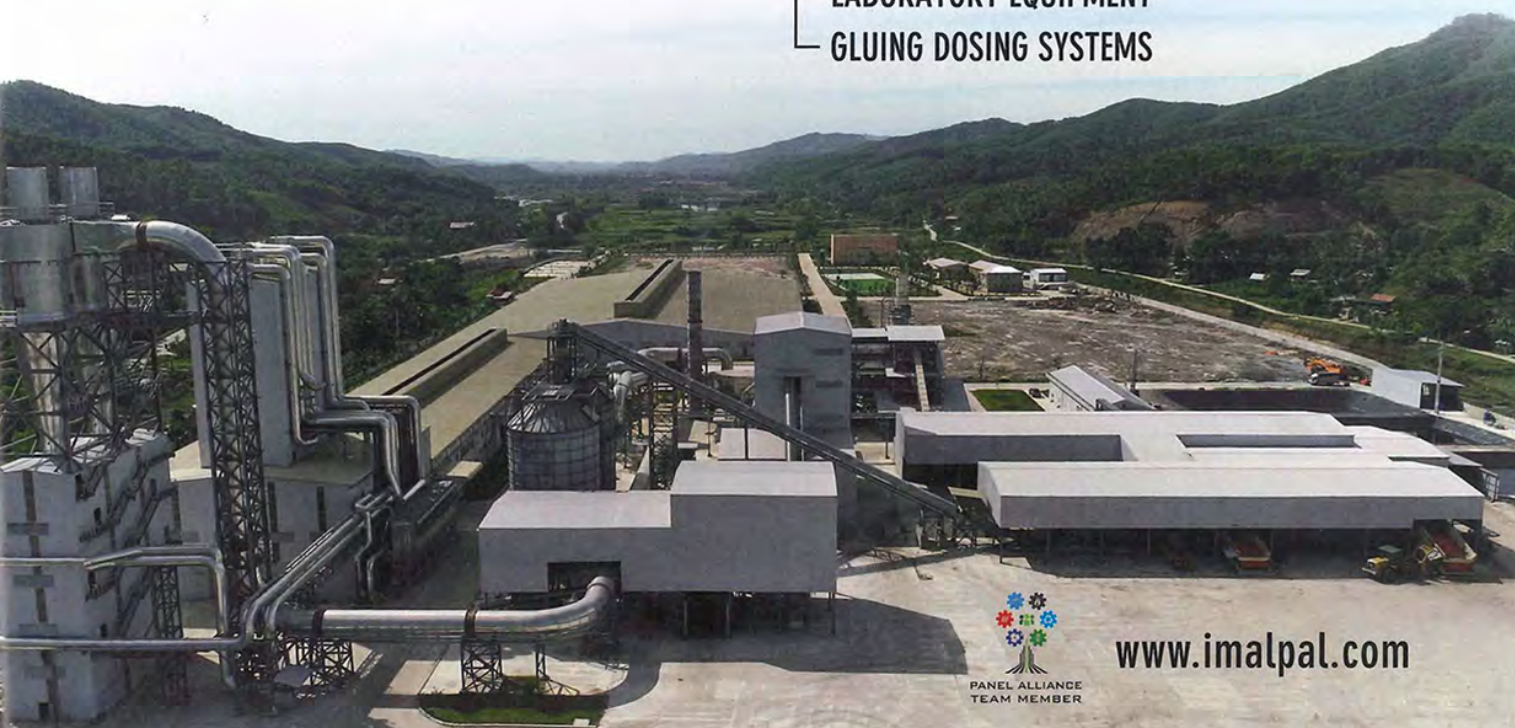


COMPLETE

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- WOOD RECYCLING PLANTS
- BELT DRYER SYSTEMS

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- WOOD CHIPPERS, OSB STRANDERS AND MILLS
- CHIP CLEANING SYSTEMS
- ONLINE QUALITY CONTROL EQUIPMENT
- LABORATORY EQUIPMENT
- GLUING DOSING SYSTEMS



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Above: IMAL's new office building at the headquarters in Modena

IMAL PAL Group CEO Loris Zanasi has seen and experienced a lot in his over 40 years at the company, but 2020 brought something entirely new.

This was the ability to negotiate and conclude a major contract for the supply of a complete new wood-based panels plant without actually travelling to the new customer and meeting them in person.

The contract in question was a complete OSB plant for Monolit-Stroy LLC (Latat brand) in Tomsk, Russia.

"It was a strange situation last year in that we started to learn about making

promotions by video conference," explained Mr Zanasi.

"For the first time, we worked last year to get the order for a complete OSB plant in Russia, without any travel. I was not able to meet the customer personally [due to the Covid-19 restrictions]. In the past you would not think of things like this for such a big order.

"We have already shipped a large part of the equipment and we are now installing the plant," he added.

The project features a 30m-long continuous press, which is 100% designed

and manufactured in the north of Italy, with components only being sourced from Europe – steel, for example.

"In order to compete against our competitors we have no choice but to try to be better," said Mr Zanasi.

The Latat contract is a landmark project for IMAL PAL.

The line will have an annual OSB capacity of 250,000m³ and according to a statement earlier this year by the Governor of the Tomsk region, Sergey Zhvachkin, the project has a value of RUB5bn and will create about 600 jobs.



Above (from top to bottom):
The IMAL OSB press under erection to Latat, Tomsk
Completed IMAL press
IMAL PAL Group is seeing many enquiries for its belt dryers

About 260 trucks will be involved in transporting the equipment to the site in Siberia.
The first board is hoped to be produced by March 2022 and full production to be reached two months later.
Latat already operates an MDF plant at the Tomsk site, with an estimated annual production capacity of 330,000m³. It bought the assets on the site, previously operated by Partner-Tomsk, in 2017.

IMAL-PAL BUSINESS & PROJECTS
Mr Zanasi said the unprecedented pandemic situation had impacted all the companies supplying equipment during 2020.

"Our turnover in 2020 was lower than the average of the previous years but that happened in almost all companies in the world," he said.
In 2021, the whole IMAL-PAL Group (including Globus) is forecast to reach a turnover of €210m-220m, slightly more than 2019.

"What is interesting for IMAL is that we have very nice portfolio orders.
"We are now discussing another four OSB complete line projects across the world."

Because these are in negotiation phase, no customer names can be released, but one of them is a large group that wants to switch a particleboard operation over to OSB and LSB (light strand board).

IMAL PAL continues its relationship with Italian board producer Ipan – it supplied a continuous press line to the company about eight years ago for the manufacture of OSB and LSB.

The line's success has led to further talks with IMAL about a potential new second OSB line and it is believed that Ipan are seeking permissions for the second plant.

"I'm quite confident about the second line from Ipan next year because they are extremely satisfied with our equipment and the plant is running well."

For all these projects being discussed, IMAL PAL Group is not promoting traditional drum dryers, but its belt dryers instead.

"In order to guarantee the right dust and VOC emissions, drum dryers have to be equipped with electrostatic filters and they run with a very high temperature.

"Our belt dryer, which we are installing at Latat, runs with a low temperature – about 95°C compared with 300-400°C for the drum dryer.

"Because of that we have VOC emissions that are very low. So, we are claiming that our belt dryer solution is much more ecological, for example we guarantee dust emissions below 5mg/m³ of air."

The Group has so far manufactured about 30 belt dryers, in a wide range of capacity for example from 3 ton/h water evaporation in Costa Rica up to about 30 ton/h.

Three belt dryers have been installed in France plus the company has received a new order for two belt dryers from one of the largest groups in Europe.

A big unit for Spain's Tableros Hispanos is now under erection, and further belt dryers from customers in Belgium and Ireland are under construction.

IMAL PAL Group emphasises the belt dryer technology has been modified and updated to allow the system to work to a low material output moisture content of just 1-2%.

Another large project being worked on is in northern Italy and is focused on pallet blocks and pressed woodchip pallets.

The project is worth over €35m and features similar technology as a particleboard plant and uses 100% PMDI resin to remove formaldehyde emissions.

This project represents a major update of the announcement IMAL PAL Group made a year ago in *WBPI's Focus on Italy ('IMAL brings new horizon to pallets')*, when the company unveiled its technology for complete woodchip pressed pallets.

It has a pilot plant at Modena but this project near Torino is the first commercial application of the technology. The customer is a big waste wood recycler.

"The customer wants to make a valuable product to be sold on the market and make profit from the raw material," said Mr Zanasi.

"It will be a turnkey plant and we will see delivery and installation in the autumn of 2022.

"It includes the energy plant, drying, wood preparation, screening, gluing, complete press line, packaging, handling and wrapping. It is a good project and a nice alternative to the traditional panels business and based on similar technology."

IMAL has designed an innovative single opening press with mould including forming and gluing, to produce

pallets completely from woodchips.
The pallets are a standard 1.2m x 0.8m size and made as one piece in a mould. The press uses steam to accelerate the process.

In terms of strength, Imal believes the new pallet should be able to carry loads up to Europallet specification.

IMAL PAL recognises that this innovation feeds into an important world trend – recovering and maximising the use of wood waste. It has focused great importance on this area, citing European targets to eliminate avoidable waste by 2050 and the circular economy concept.

"We need to recover the huge amount of waste wood in all countries. It should be forbidden for the entire world to put anything into the ground – whether it is wood, plastic or other materials. The circular economy for us is a huge point."

Meanwhile, another project that involves the supply of equipment to a new wood fibre insulation board plant in Sardinia is almost completed.

IMAL PAL has plans to make a video promotion film of the plant when it is up and running.

"We are now dealing with three customers for three separate factories for wood fibre insulation board," added Mr Zanasi. "Two of these are outside Europe and are under current discussion."

The pallet block plant business is going well, with the company reporting success with a French customer who installed a line recently and has now placed orders for two further lines.

Installation is finalising for the two additional lines. That gives IMAL PAL Group a total of six pallet block extrusion lines in France.

Of course, the core business for IMAL is still supplying gluing and dosing systems for existing plants.

It recently received an order for five complete gluing systems from Swiss Krono at different sites around the world.

Its quality control (thickness, density and surface quality) equipment is also a mainstay, as is its wide range of laboratory equipment.

And the DynaSteam mat pre-heating system continues to grow its customer application reach globally. Today about 135 units are installed worldwide.

The PAL wood preparation business, covered extensively in *WBPI* in our *'Making the most of Wood'* and *'Recycling – a key for the future'* features in 2020 and 2021, continues to see high customer enquiries.

Another major novelty is the new Strander for OSB production designed by Globus, a company belonging to the IMAL PAL group, of which four units have been sold to date.

FUTURE INVESTMENT PROSPECTS
The Group is optimistic about the future development of the global wood-based panels industry but also recognises that investment in specific countries may depend on the trajectory of the pandemic in those nations.

Mr Zanasi said many European countries had high Covid-19 vaccination rates, which he thought boded well for better business prospects there.

But those with low vaccination rates he thinks could struggle with positive business levels and investment.

Looking further ahead, the group believes the next physical Ligna show in 2023 will be an important event for the wood-based industries.

And nearer to home, visitors to IMAL in Modena will now notice the completion of a recent extensive site improvement plan – a multi-million euro project to expand and update the facilities and offices, leading to a greater capacity and efficiency of working. ●



Above left: The woodchip pressed pallet business is going well
Above right: The DynaSteam mat pre-heating system