



PRESS RELEASE
Regulated information

Ontex Eeklo is the Belgian 'Factory of the Future'

Eeklo (Belgium), 4 February 2016 – Following a very thorough assessment procedure the award for 'Factory of the Future' was finally presented to Ontex Eeklo by technology federation Agoria and Sirris, the collective centre of the technology industry. This production unit belongs to the ONTEX GROUP NV, a leading international manufacturer of disposable solutions in personal hygiene for women, children and adults. Over the past year the production site in Eeklo has been investing in advanced production technology, digitisation, ecology and social innovation, taking it to the top of the world's industrial manufacturing.

With the initiative of technology federation Agoria and Sirris, the collective centre of the technology industry, the 'Factory of the Future' was launched. As 'Factory of the Future', Ontex Eeklo stands out as a future-proof production company that is able to take advantage of changing market conditions easily and well-positioned to play an important part in a global production network. This means that the Ontex factory in Eeklo has a leading role in the field of innovation, using its smart, sustainable and digitised processes.

*"In a market where maintaining a competitive edge means continuously adapting production processes it is essential that we make our business flexible and resistant to the future. This award is therefore recognition of our years of effort and focus to be an innovative and pioneering manufacturer in the hygiene industry", says **Jef Monballyu, Plant Manager Ontex Eeklo.***

With over 500 employees Ontex Eeklo is one of the largest employers in the region. Every day millions of diapers, sanitary towels and panty liners are produced on their 23 high-tech production lines.

A leading production process focused on the consumer

Over the last five years Ontex Eeklo has worked hard to build its prominent position in the field of technology. To reach this level the factory has invested in various new high-tech production machines for the manufacture of baby diapers and ultra-thin sanitary towels. Besides production speed, the innovations lie mainly in automatic camera inspection as part of quality control and the use of ultra-sound technology, which reduces energy consumption and maintenance and allows for a more stable production process.

In addition Ontex has consciously chosen to focus the global Research and Development department for feminine hygiene within the production site at Eeklo, meaning that innovation efforts are fundamentally embedded in the production process. Ontex also has its own engineering department, which develops machines for in-house use. This encourages efficiency and stimulates the development of new products, including the use of 3D-printing for machine components. A key feature of all this is that the consumer lies at the heart of every product development. Intensive consumer research allows Ontex to truly understand the consumer's needs and translate these into inventive products that really suit the consumer.



Ontex Eeklo goes green

An important aspect in the Factory of the Future project is reducing the environmental impact of the manufacturing process.

Ontex Eeklo carried out an extensive environmental study to identify the environmental impact of all its activities and products, including the use of plastics, energy consumption and transport. This involved the use of digital LCA software ('Life Cycle Assessment') to assess the impact of product changes upon the environment.

On this basis various eco-efficiency projects were launched, aimed at generating less waste and decreasing the use of raw materials without compromising the quality of the final product. Furthermore there was considerable emphasis on eco-design and environmentally friendly production methods. Ontex Eeklo also attaches considerable importance to the sourcing of sustainable raw materials and certified pulp.

Ontex Eeklo has also invested heavily in energy efficiency. This year Ontex Eeklo switched over to green energy, reducing their ecological footprint significantly. They are also using an efficient logistics system to improve transport efficiency and reduce noise pollution and CO2 emissions.

"Sustainability is deep-rooted at Ontex. We strongly believe in reducing our ecological footprint. We aim to be a top player in sustainability when it comes to disposable hygiene products," confirms **Jef Monballyu, Plant Manager Ontex Eeklo**.

Investing in people

Ontex began as a family business and has now developed to become a pioneering publicly listed international consumer goods company. For Ontex Eeklo this meant it was important not just to invest in technology, but also in its human assets.

Increasing employee involvement was one of the priorities within the 'Factory of the Future' project. Participation and taking initiatives are a key focus together with employee safety and well-being. This means considerable emphasis on human-focused processes, which are so often forgotten within the production environment: ergonomics, focus on training and development opportunities and a positive attendance policy, plus activities focused on well-being and a quit smoking campaign. Ontex staff can also take advantage of an international exchange programme, allowing them to gain experience and knowledge at other Ontex sites across the world.

"It's important to us that our staff feel like they belong to the Ontex family. Over the last few years we have made considerable efforts to provide our staff with a modern working environment, to offer courses and training and to set up a variety of activities focused on well-being at work as well as encouraging the work-life balance", continues **Jef Monballyu, Plant Manager Ontex Eeklo**.

On 4 February 2016, Ontex Eeklo Plant Manager, Jef Monballyu, will accept the award on behalf of all employees, presented by Charles Beauduin, CEO of Van de Wiele and godfather of the 'Made Different' programme.

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Gaëlle Vilatte
+32 53 333 708
gaelle.vilatte@ontexglobal.com

About Ontex

Ontex is a leading producer of disposable personal hygiene products, ranging from baby diapers to products for feminine hygiene and adult incontinence. Ontex's products are distributed in more than 100 countries through Ontex brands as well as leading retailer brands.

The group employs over 5,500 staff and has a presence in 23 countries. Ontex is listed on NYSE Euronext Brussels.