

Braskem adding UHMWPE capacity in Texas

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Image By: Braskem SA Braskem SA will add UHMWPE capacity at **La Porte, Texas**, where it already has 860 million pounds of polypropylene capacity.

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Brazilian plastics giant **Braskem SA** will spend **\$34 million** to build a plant making ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene (UHMWPE) at its site in **La Porte, Texas**.

Construction on the plant will begin in the third quarter of 2014, with completion expected in the first half of 2016. São Paulo-based Braskem currently only makes UHMWPE in Brazil. The firm sells the material under the UTEC brand name.

“We believe our investment reinforces Braskem’s dedication to the plastics industry and to our strategic markets and clients,” Braskem America CEO Fernando Musa said in a June 27 news release.

He added that the new plant “is the next logical step for our UTEC business, as we have been providing UTEC to clients in the United States and Europe for over 10 years.”

UTEC-brand UHMWPE offers high abrasion resistance and impact strength, Braskem officials said. The material is eight times lighter than steel and lasts 10 times longer than high density PE, they added. Industries that use UTEC include construction, agriculture and automotive.

The new plant will create an unspecified number of new jobs and also will make use of the 100-member work force Braskem already has in La Porte, a company spokeswoman said. An annual production capacity number for the new plant was unavailable.

Braskem already operates about 860 million pounds of annual polypropylene resin capacity in La Porte. The firm ranks as North America's largest PP maker, with a total of five plants in Texas, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The announcement adds to a busy growth schedule for Braskem. In October, the firm confirmed it was adding about 260 million pounds of annual linear low density PE production capacity in Brazil. That same month, Braskem announced the formation of an ABS joint venture with Styrolution GmbH and the building of a new plant making ABS and related resins in Brazil.

Braskem also is majority partner in the Ethylene XXI joint venture which is expected to open a major complex making PE and ethylene feedstock in Coatzacoalcos, Mexico, in July 2015. Grupo Idea SA de CV of Mexico City is Braskem's partner in the project.