



Michael Greenman

GMIC Goes Global

The membership of the Glass Manufacturing Industry Council voted unanimously during the October 18, 2007, annual meeting to open up membership to a new category: glass companies that do not melt glass in the United States. This is a major change to our “Code of Regulations,” the rules under which we operate.

GMIC was formed in 1998 out of a desire by our industry to work with the DOE’s “Industries of the Future” Program on cost-shared research projects that would lead to significant reductions in the energy “intensity” of our industry—a growing issue as prices rose and climate needed to be addressed. Technologies developed in cooperation with DOE needed to be introduced first in the U.S. That was the reason for our membership restriction.

In recent years, however, GMIC’s activities have broadened to include a wider range of interests, such as a search for greater strength in glass, alternative energy sources, emissions reduction, educational and safety issues, and many others. Activities involving DOE funding have been reduced to close to nothing in recent years.

Global Industry, Global Challenges

The global glass industry faces many of the same challenges wherever plants are located. Today we all face increases in energy prices, growing concerns for the impact of industry on the climate, challenges to recycling activities and increasing competition from alternative products. The ability to discuss and work on these issues from a broad geographical base could significantly increase the likelihood of making progress that would benefit all of our industry everywhere. Since our members already represent six national origins and most of the U.S. companies also operate internationally, opening up our membership to the broader global population made sense.

Associate members of any nationality (suppliers, consultants, engineering firms, research organizations and others that play important roles in supporting the industry) have always been eligible for membership. Among this category of membership are companies with corporate headquarters in five countries.

Cooperation has in fact already begun: Last year we co-sponsored a global glass strength contest that attracted 47 entries from 28 universities in five countries. It was publicized through associations that are members of the International Commission on Glass in 33 countries. We are planning to organize similar student contests to stimulate interest in the glass industry.

Our members have been involved with exchanges with the European glass industry: in 2004 a number of U.S. glass manufacturers visited German and Dutch plants as well as Latvia and went to the original “submerged combustion” melters in Belarus. This year a contingent of international glass professionals organized by the Dutch research institute, TNO, and its “Trend” members, made a return visit to the United States, with the support of GMIC. More than 20 visitors traveled to Des Plaines, Ill.,

to see the Submerged Combustion Melter at GTI; to Boulder, Colo., to visit Plasmelt’s new plasma melter; to Tonawanda, N.Y., to see Praxair’s cullet/batch preheater (under development); and to Washington, D.C., to visit the Vitreous State Laboratory at the Catholic University of America. We also participated in discussions with DOE and EPA’s “Energy Star for Industry” program on the direction that energy conservation and emissions reduction are taking on both sides of the Atlantic. At the conclusion of the Glass Problems Conference in October in Columbus, Ohio, GMIC hosted an energy workshop, “Paths to Sustainability – The Search for Energy Efficiency,” that was attended by glass professionals from 10 countries who heard speakers from six nations share practical ideas for reducing energy intensity in a glass melting operation.

Internet Erases Barriers

The work of GMIC is carried out primarily through its committees. With the capabilities of the Internet to host listservs and conferences, either through real-time on-line meetings or exchanges of E-mails, a great deal can be accomplished between individuals representing glass companies or suppliers in geographically distant locations. Annual meetings are likely to be held in conjunction with an increasingly international and diverse Glass Problems Conference.

Next month, I’ll tell you more about these committees and how they may be of benefit to the global glass industry.

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