

Dunlop fights back

Netherlands-based Dunlop Conveyor Belting (Fenner Dunlop BV) has been forced to re-double its efforts to make it even more difficult for others to create low-quality imitations of its belts. An increasing number of cases are coming to light where end-users have mistakenly purchased what they believed to be genuine 'Made in Holland' conveyor belts, only to find out to their cost that they are not genuine at all.

Dunlop is understandably proud of its 99.99% quality success ratio. "Complaints really are a very rare occurrence," says application engineering manager Sytze Brouwers. "This enables us to investigate any complaint that we do receive very thoroughly and what we invariably find is that the problem 'Dunlop' belt has been made by someone else using the Dunlop name."

"It is a growing problem," explains sales & marketing director Andries Smilda. "The Dunlop brand has always been associated with quality and I think that it is fair to say that the belts we manufacture in our factory here in The Netherlands are widely seen as being the world benchmark for quality and extended operational lifetime. The problem is that a number of organizations around the world obtained localized rights to the Dunlop name and the logo when the British-based Dunlop company was broken up and sold off many years ago."

This fact is certainly a very difficult issue because a number of companies based in Africa, Asia and South America are legally entitled to use the Dunlop name despite having no connection with Fenner Dunlop whatsoever. "Strictly speaking, they should not be using the Dunlop brand name when exporting outside of their own continent but it is almost impossible for us to control," added Smilda. "Fortunately what we can control is the quality of



our products, which are head and shoulders above any would-be imitator in every respect."

TESTS, TESTS AND MORE TESTS

Using its extensive laboratory testing facilities, Dunlop Conveyor Belting goes to great lengths to not only make sure that its own belts exceed international standards but also to see how its competitors perform against those same standards. "We have a great network of loyal customers and distributors so we have a ready supply of competitor belting to test and compare," says Smilda. "Some performance characteristics such as abrasion resistance directly determine the working life of the belt. In other words, the true test of value for money, but for properties such as fire resistance we are talking about very serious safety issues. Many of the so-called fire-resistant belts we test actually burn like paper."

BRAND-NEW DUNLOP.

Managing director Edwin Have believes that the best form of defence is attack. Having invested millions in a new, state-of-the-

art steelcord production line, expanded production capacity and the latest laboratory equipment for testing everything from extreme cold to ozone plus its own service network in Europe, Africa and the Middle-East, Dunlop has applied the same approach to overcoming the threat of poor quality imitations.

Although it will not disclose the precise amounts involved, Dunlop has made a further "substantial investment" in hi-tech water jet cutting machinery to create rubber branding (usually bright yellow) and the statement 'MADE IN HOLLAND' that is embedded in the surface of the belt. This has been a natural follow-on to the introduction of similarly bold branding on every form of packaging. "If the belt and the packaging does not say 'Dunlop, Made in Holland' then it almost certainly is not the real thing" says Have.



IDENTITY THEFT

Dunlop is also the victim of a practice that virtually amounts to identity theft. An organization in India (as yet unidentified) has created a website using the Dunlop Conveyor Belting name and has even copied text extracts from Dunlop's own website to create the illusion that it is Dunlop's official Indian operation. This enables it to attract internet search enquiries from would-be Dunlop customers who innocently believe that they are buying genuine Dunlop quality at lower prices. Have says that it is almost impossible to deal with this kind of fraudulent practice. "Even if you manage to have one website closed down, they will quickly create another. This is why improving the branding of our products is so important. It is a never-ending battle."

PRICE WAR

Conveyor belt manufacturing has always been a highly competitive industry but in recent years the large scale 'dumping' of belting, primarily from Asia — and often of a very dubious quality — has been taking place on an unprecedented scale. One of the problems seems to lie with the fact that, at first glance, industrial conveyor belts all look very similar — big long lengths of thick black rubber!

According to Dunlop, it is almost impossible for the untrained eye to tell if a conveyor belt is of the required quality and specification just by visual examination. For example, a belt that has thinner covers than they are claimed to be can quite significantly reduce the selling price. Sadly, in a great many cases, the labelling and certification will appear to be totally the correct specification. Conveyor belt users who believe that they have saved money by buying a belt at a low price per metre are invariably paying a much higher cost in the longer term because the belts wear out prematurely and stretch and tear much more easily than they should do.



Dunlop says that 80% of the cost of making a belt is in the raw materials. For major buyers like Dunlop, worldwide prices for compound ingredients are very similar so if the quality of the raw materials is virtually equal there could never be a massive price difference. The labour cost aspect only represents around 13% of the production cost. The real key, Dunlop maintains, is what goes into the rubber compound.

Apart from using lower-quality materials in the first place, the single most effective way for a manufacturer to reduce costs is to use calcium carbonate (chalk) to bulk up the volume (thereby reducing the cost) of the rubber compound mix. This has a seriously detrimental effect on the abrasion resistance of the rubber and its overall mechanical performance.



GETTING WHAT YOU PAY FOR

Regardless of the supplier, Dunlop's advice to all conveyor belt buyers is never to assume that the delivered belt is precisely what was ordered. A few basic checks should be carried out before fitting by inspecting the top and bottom surfaces of the belt to see if the manufacturer's branding can be seen. Measuring the thickness of the belt using a micrometer is also recommended. Especially where fire resistant belting is involved, for even greater peace of mind it is often a good idea to order an extra metre of belt so that it can be used for testing by an accredited testing authority or laboratory.

If the buyer is at all suspicious then they should contact the original manufacturer. In Dunlop's case, the company will either test a sample for authenticity and compliance or, wherever practical, send an expert to the site. The old adage "You only get what you pay for" certainly seems to apply to the conveyor belt industry!



Dunlop - the toughest belts for the toughest conditions with outstanding resistance to:

- Wear (abrasion)
- Fire
- Oil
- Ripping and tearing
- Heat – up to 400° C
- Extreme Cold
- Heavy and sharp impact
- Chemicals

Dunlop "MADE IN HOLLAND"
"The toughest, longest lasting belts in the world!"

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+31 512 585 555