

From FPL to FPL

Sixty years of applied basic pigment, paint and coatings research



Approximately 60 years after the German Research Institute for Pigments and Coatings (FPL e.V.) was officially founded on 15 December 1950, the institute was officially handed over to Fraunhofer Society for Promotion of applied Research in November 2009. By this measure coatings research has become even more future-oriented by combining the knowledge from paint raw materials and paint over paint application to the finished coatings in one institution, as an expert partner of industry and science, leaving FPL e.V. as a Research Society for supporting applied research in the coatings field.

Being the end of the independence of this well-known institute, the former FPL institute part is now integrated as a department called "Coatings and Pigments" in a complementary surrounding of surface technology of Fraunhofer Institute for Manufacturing Engineering (FhG IPA). Since then FPL e.V. became Research Society for Pigments and Coatings. FPL will stay and prosper as an institution to support and fund applied basic research in the field of coatings and related materials.

Inevitable structural reform process

In order to help the pigment and coating industries to stay competitive and contribute further to the growth of the economy, in the first years after the foundation of the institute in 1950, scientific research was to be introduced to an area, where so far individual experience and empirical experimenting had dominated.

The mission of the FPL was and is to translate problems in the manufacture and application of pigments and coatings in scientific questions. In summary, the FPL institute part has been working to identify and pursue unsolved problems, take up new questions, broaden existing knowledge and open new perspectives by innovative research. During the years until the beginning of this millennium, an equilibrium concerning the financial income of the institute emerged:

- » One third basic financing from member companies and other stakeholders, e. g. public funding
- » One third publicly funded project research
- » One third contract research for the industry

Scientific progress today is only possible based on a sound financial situation. During the last decade, budget constraints of the public sponsors and also sponsorship reorientation of the German Coatings and Printing Inks Industry Association (VdL) resulted in a reduction of basic financing of FPL.

This made it necessary, to expand contract research. Board and management of the FPL recognized the strategic trap, which was critical for a prospering research in the field of paints, pigments and coatings for the future, due to the legal situation of finance laws. Finally, after a long decision process, the goal was clear: The renowned Fraunhofer Society for Promotion of applied Research offered, to integrate the institute part of the FPL e.V. into Fraunhofer IPA. IPA has been working in the field of surface technology, especially in the working area of paint application for more than two decades. The former institute part of the FPL e.V. prospers within the Fraunhofer network concerning new ideas and applied working areas for modern coatings in the interface between applied basic research and paint application. Practically, there is still some work to be done:

- » Strengthening of the orientation and relationship to our "customers"
- » Adaptation of internal processes of work to FhG standards
- » National and international cooperation with other research institutions inside and outside FhG

The future focus of FPL

FPL on the other side has direct access to the umbrella of funding of industrial cooperative research (IGF) for medium and small paint and pigment companies and paint using companies in Germany. This joint research is directly supported by the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology through AiF e.V. in order to compensate the relative research disadvantages faced by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Significant technical and economic changes in the field of coatings and pigments have occurred since the founding years. This changes are illustrated by the worldwide consolidation of the markets and the companies, the more extensive research and the development resources within the industry itself, the greater concentration of industrial enterprises on development processes within their core fields and - alongside rapidly progressing globalization and new information and communications technologies - a diminishing supply of the young scientific staff. The new constellation is nonetheless excellently equipped to face its future tasks: These are seen mainly in the field of functional (smart) coatings and their contribution to make the world more sustainable as well as in improved corrosion protection materials, testing methods and new and efficient curing processes for reduced energy consumption and improved material properties. FPL will be the future partner to make these visions and ideas happen. ◀



*Dr Michael Hilt,
General Manager,
FPL e.V.
(Research Society
for Pigments and
Coatings)
and Head of De-
partment "Coatings
and Pigments" at
Fraunhofer IPA*