In just 35 years, DuPont Korea has gone from being a liaison office for the American chemical company DuPont to an innovation pioneer for the group. In 2011, DuPont chose Korea to be the home of its first innovation center, of which there are now 12 worldwide.

Why Korea? Important and diverse customers, the fact that innovation is a crucial element of success here and strong core industries including electronics and automobiles.

“So this is really a very, very successful story we have in Korea,” said Jeong Taik Rim, President of DuPont Korea Inc.

In fact, the story of DuPont Korea has been one of consistent growth and milestones. DuPont first started doing business in Korea in the 1970s, during a period of significant economic growth. It made its first sizable investment in 1985, officially establishing DuPont Korea, which, at the time, focused on manufacturing connectors for the electronics industry. More investments followed in the late 80s and early 90s — for the manufacture of photomasks for semiconductors and safety film for the glass of automobiles.

Having sold the connector and photomask businesses, DuPont Korea focuses today on the advanced materials business unit of DuPont, manufacturing mostly performance materials, performance chemicals and electronics materials for industries including automobile, electronics and construction. DuPont has two other business units globally — biomaterials and agriculture & food.

A provider of science and engineering solutions through products, materials and services for more than 200 years, DuPont introduces thousands of new products and patent applications annually, serving everything from the agriculture and nutrition to the transportation and apparel markets.

At its manufacturing site in Ulsan, DuPont Korea produces engineering polymers, Butacite® interlayer film for laminated glass and Corian® solid surfaces. The company’s other manufacturing site, SD Flex in Gumi, is one of a joint venture with Korea’s Cheil Industries, an affiliate of the Samsung Group. Here they produce copper-laminate type products for mobile phones.

The DuPont Korea Innovation Center, located in Bundang, is used mostly as a facility in which to connect with customers and with DuPont’s research and development experts at the company’s United States headquarters and elsewhere in the world.

“So we can connect with all of them and focus on the specific issues and innovation projects,” said Rim.

Through these facilities, plus DuPont Korea’s Seoul headquarters, Rim and his staff of about 400 people serve the major players of many industries in Korea, including Samsung, LG, Hyundai and Kia, selling products to their tier 1 / tier 2 suppliers.

Revenue in 2012 reached about USD 700 million, which put DuPont Korea at 11th among DuPont’s more than 90 offices worldwide in terms of revenue. The Korea operations is also one of the fastest growing businesses in Asia for DuPont, which has invested a total of about USD 300 million in Korea and continues to invest in the country to improve its processes and facilities.

While the company focuses on advanced materials, it is also expanding its agriculture and biomaterials business units along with the global DuPont’s heightened focus on agriculture & food value chains and alternative energy. Korea’s big food companies are now customers of DuPont Korea, as are Korean energy companies interested in biofuels. DuPont Korea is also applying its industrial biotechnology capabilities to differentiate its advanced materials, such as polymers, electronic materials and alternative energy.

“We are now here to support our customers, so that they can grow,” said Rim. “So as a materials supplier, we continuously develop new material and introduce that to our customers so that they can improve their products in terms of quality and applications.”

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Did you know?
- DuPont started out as a gunpowder manufacturer in the United States in 1802.
- DuPont Korea received the Best Employers in Korea 2009 distinction from Hewitt.