PRESS RELEASE

Unilin Pilot Plant and innovative technology herald new level of recyclability for laminate flooring

EPF and Unilin are partners in the H2020 European project CISUFLO (CIrcular SUstainable FlOor coverings) that has as main goal the transition to a sustainable circular flooring sector and is supported by innovation funds from the European Union. The consortium consists of 19 partners: industrial partners, research centers and associations and the project covers laminate, textile and vinyl floor coverings.

Product circularity is key for the preservation of our planet if we want to prevent depletion of our finite resources. Therefore, solutions need to be developed to make current flooring materials circular by design and/or by developing recycling technologies that recycle these products into new similar flooring products.

Nowadays, laminate flooring in particular and all MDF/HDF containing products in general, are often considered as hardly recyclable and such products commonly end in landfills or incineration at the end-of-life. This is an outcome that everyone wishes to change.

In order to close the recycling loop, a revolutionising technology has been developed by Unilin based on steam explosion. This allows the extraction of valuable wood fibres from MDF/HDF containing products (in particular laminate flooring). These fibres are then prepared for reuse and used as a replacement of virgin fibres in an HDF production process. This allows to recycle the main part of a laminate flooring, being the core HDF.

Unilin has spearheaded this initiative by establishing a pilot line at its MDF mill in Bazeilles, France. Since 2021 this line has been refined to the process needs of the recycling process. The actual status is that this line is producing over 1 ton of recycled fibres per hour, and these fibres are immediately reused in the production of new MDF/HDF products on a continuous basis. This rather small recycling unit demonstrates already the huge potential of the developed technology: not only the fact that fibres can be extracted and reused, with no significant impact on quality, but the recycling can be done at economically interesting conditions. In fact, the way the process performs, it even saves electrical/thermal energy compared to the energy required for producing wood fibres based on virgin wood.

This success refutes the sometimes perceived image of MDF/HDF as being a non-recyclable product and instead demonstrates its circularity, for which European wood-based panels are known.

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CIRCULAR SUSTAINABLE FLOOR COVERINGS