

Press Release

PORR, Saint-Gobain, Saubermacher: Green light for first gypsum-to-gypsum- recycling plant in Austria

- Cross-sector partnership realises “Zero Waste Vision” for plasterboard
- Legal framework serves as both success factor and challenge
- Trailblazing model for delivering on circular economy

Vienna, 03.10.2023 - Construction company PORR, dry construction specialist Saint-Gobain (known for its RIGIPS brand) and waste management company Saubermacher are introducing Austria's first gypsum-to-gypsum-recycling plant. The new plant will have an annual capacity of around 60,000 tonnes, making it capable of covering demand in the east of Austria.

The joint initiative not only conserves Austria's raw material resources, which are not endlessly available, but also the limited landfill capacities. It proactively addresses the nationwide landfill ban on plasterboard that is due to come into force on 1 January 2026 and achieves another milestone in Austria's circular economy. Federal Minister Leonore Gewessler*) also welcomes the presented gypsum-to-gypsum-project.

Realising the entire project will require investment of seven million euro, divided between the gypsum-to-gypsum (GtG)-recycling plant and the logistics solutions. The plan is for the Saint-Gobain site in Stockerau to be operational by mid-2025.

Gypsum-to-gypsum - circular economy through teamwork

PORR and Saubermacher are active as strong players in the demolition and disposal market, which ensures the supply of gypsum waste. The recycling specialist Saubermacher provides amongst other new digital logistics solutions to bring gypsum waste from construction sites to the processing plant in a transparent and traceable manner. PORR recycles around two million tonnes of construction waste per year, making it the largest recycler in the Austrian construction industry. The majority of this replaces primary raw materials at the company's own construction sites and plants.

After processing, the recycled gypsum (RC gypsum) is transported in a CO₂-friendly way by rail to Bad Aussee, where dry construction specialist Saint-Gobain produces new plasterboard (RIGIPS board) from the recycled material. Up to 40 percent recycled gypsum can be used in new plasterboard. This in turn conserves the raw material that is natural gypsum. “Sustainable and economical recycling is only possible through a cross-sector partnership like this”, PORR, Saint-Gobain and Saubermacher together confirm at a press conference. The economic viability of the project is the key to its success since it is currently still possible to send plasterboard cuttings and deconstruction material to landfill at extremely low cost. This has led to practically 100 percent of the demolition material ending up in landfill.



No recycling without proper pre-sorting

“Gypsum is endlessly recyclable, but special quality criteria must be met in order for recycled gypsum to be used again to produce new panels”, explains Peter Giffinger, CEO Austria at Saint-Gobain. Professional pre-sorting on construction sites is therefore essential. “We are breaking new ground in the way that we separate by type at construction sites in Austria. Among other things, at PORR we are currently investigating what degree of shredding is optimal to facilitate the successful processing of the demolition material in the new plant”, says PORR COO Josef Pein.

“Successful recycling is not only closely tied to the quality of the material, but also the quantity”, says Ralf Mittermayr, CEO at Saubermacher. The efforts only pay off if enough material is delivered. Along with PORR, Saubermacher is one of the largest companies in Austria for construction site waste disposal. The firm has direct access to waste producers via its own waste disposal centres and, for example, the digital collection platform “wastebbox”, which means that training can be given in how to separate out gypsum waste, thereby ensuring better implementation.

Importance of legal framework

The legal framework plays a crucial role for a “genuine circular economy”. This is because the three project partners have set themselves the clear goal of meeting the targets set by the EU with regard to high-quality recycling. The present legal text is thereby not only about preventing waste being sent to landfill from 1 January 2026, but also about promoting the recycling of plasterboard as part of a circular economy. For this reason, PORR, Saint-Gobain and Saubermacher support the draft of a Gypsum Recycling Regulation to promote the recycling of gypsum and at the same time guarantee that the recycled gypsum is of high quality.

Ensuring the supply of raw materials

Gypsum is a natural raw material that is not endlessly available. The popular construction material is mined or accumulates as a byproduct in chemical processes and in the flue gas desulphurisation of coal-fired power plants (FGD gypsum). The European Commission’s Green Deal states that all coal-fired power plants are to be shut down by 2035, making the regional supply of raw materials even more important.

The Austrian federal government’s “Raw Materials 2030” master plan is dedicated to securing supply while the European raw materials strategy also prioritizes domestic sources and recycling. In order to prevent a shortage of gypsum as a raw material, the plan is to increasingly rely on recycling as a supplementary source. Gips-zu-Gips-Recycling GmbH is taking on a trailblazing role in Austria.

*) Videostatement of Federal Minister Gewessler <https://youtu.be/W-hzWf-AxfY>

Photo:



f.l.t.r.: Josef Pein (COO PORR), Ralf Mittermayr (CEO Saubermacher), Peter Giffinger (CEO Saint-Gobain)
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Top performance driven by innovation - that is what PORR has embodied for more than 150 years. With around 20,000 employees and production output of around EUR 6.2 bn (business year 2022), PORR is one of the largest construction companies in Austria and among the top players in Europe. As a full-service provider, PORR offers every aspect of building construction, civil engineering and infrastructure construction across the entire value chain. The focus is on the home markets of Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. PORR also works in selected international project markets such as Norway, UAE and Qatar. The PORR share is listed in the prime market segment of the Vienna Stock Exchange.

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