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Duravit and its green side



“Returning everything to the cycle, wherever possible”

The Duravit AG - internationally renowned for its leading-edge bathroom designs and now operating in 80 countries around the globe - was established over 190 years ago, right in the heart of the Black Forest. Having its roots in this exceptional natural landscape has profoundly influenced the company's history and ideology. Consideration of environmental impacts in the choice of materials, production processes, use of resources and recycling, and organisation of the workplace, have been an integral part of Duravit's philosophy right from the start. As the group's CEO, Franz Kook, puts it: “A healthy environment is our most valuable possession, and all our endeavours should aim to protect and preserve it to the best of our abilities. Water, air, soil - all of these are essential to sustain quality of life and even life itself for the human race.” Whether it's products that save water in use or manufacturing processes that minimise the use of resources - “green” thinking is engrained in everything the company does.

Saving water in use

Where the environmental performance of its products is concerned, the Duravit AG has one clear focus: “Any unnecessary water consumption that is technically avoidable, is reduced right down, so that capacities can be used in areas where they truly contribute to improving quality of life.” says Franz Kook. For example, in many countries, vast amounts of water are wasted on flushing toilets. Duravit were among the first, back in the early 1980s, to research and calculate the ideal balance between toilet bowl geometry and

volume of water, resulting in a product that functioned effectively with as little as 6 litres of water, where others, in those days, still needed 9 to 14 litres. With its McDry urinal, the manufacturer was even able to prove that it is possible to do away with water altogether. A specially developed, plant-based - and therefore biodegradable - sealing liquid successfully suppresses any unpleasant odours. The McDry's siphon is not made from plastic, but, like the urinal itself, from sanitary ceramic and therefore has an unlimited lifespan. Hence the product not only reduces water consumption to zero, it is also resource-efficient compared to urinals with plastic siphons that need replacing regularly. "The McDry is an excellent example of how to balance ecology and economy", so the Duravit CEO. He also points out a nice design detail: in its overall shape, the McDry resembles a drop of water. A single "drop of water" therefore brings about significant water savings, especially if used in public or semi-public facilities. The water thus saved can then be utilised elsewhere to benefit human well-being.

Resource-efficient manufacturing processes

The Duravit AG is equally concerned about using an environmentally sensitive approach in the manufacturing of its products. "Over the past years, we have invested millions in technologies that ensure we now use much less water and energy in our production processes", Franz Kook reports. The following three examples illustrate this:

1. Re-use of water

All Duravit manufacturing plants incorporate comprehensive facilities, which ensure that the water needed in production processes can be recycled. It is now possible to re-use 95 per cent of the water throughout the process.

2. Re-use of energy

In the firing and drying processes involved in the manufacturing of sanitary ceramics, Duravit applies the principles of heat recovery, capturing waste heat and returning it to the production process.

3. Utilising waste in energy production

In bathroom furniture production, all waste wood and chippings are salvaged and used as fuel in the production facilities, thus avoiding unnecessary transportation costs. Naturally, all the emissions from the woodchip burners pass through a sophisticated technical filter system.

Going the extra mile

The Duravit CEO is certain that, in many countries, technological progress will soon "demand further innovative thinking on how to use resources more intelligently and efficiently". Duravit has therefore made it a declared company policy to exceed current legal requirements and make a pro-active contribution to resource efficiency and reducing the environmental impact of its activities. Its maxim here is to "avoid generating waste in the first place". Starting at product development level, Duravit makes a point of considering the environmental impacts of all aspects of production and use, and investigating means of using resources more efficiently. Where waste is unavoidable, its re-use or recycling is planned in. "Our aim is to return everything to the production cycle, wherever possible", explains Kook. And he emphasises that all of these measures also make sound economic sense for the company: "We implement these measures not just to get green credentials, they also have to be economically viable. We need to be certain that they can remain in place in the long term." A sustainable approach - as practised by companies that are, within their own range of activities, taking positive steps on the path to sustainability, independent of the larger political debate.