

“Our plants are located for proximity to end markets”

Gypsum-based building solutions company Saint-Gobain, the world leader in the habitat and construction markets, designs, manufactures and distributes building materials, providing innovative solutions to meet growing demand in emerging countries, for energy efficiency and for environmental protection. Venkat Subramaniam, Managing Director, Saint-Gobain Gyproc speaks with Arya Anil about the gypsum market in India and Saint-Gobain's contribution to it. Excerpts...

What are the projects Saint-Gobain Gyproc is working on currently?

We have several projects in hand. Usually we track projects. We are in touch with architects and builders to familiarise them with the product. At any point in time, we are in discussion with 200 to 300 projects at least. Active discussions are going on these projects. There are projects, which are of longer lead times, not many discussions are going on in these. We have to deal on a regular basis with supplies to various projects across the country. We are meeting architects who are conducting different projects and getting them specified.

A dry wall would be 8-10 times lighter than an equivalent brick wall, faster to construct, offer better aesthetics as it is smoother and crack-free as the boards are machine made and can be tailored to specific needs to offer better insulation, moisture protection, fire safety with one hour to four hour rating, better insulation and acoustics.

Why is gypsum so special?

The major advantage of using gypsum-based products is that considering the traditional construction, which uses lot of water and cement and bricks, this is much handier. Also you can focus on



other things when your office space or living space is under renovation using Saint-Gobain gypsum because it gives you a peaceful atmosphere rather than the usual construction sites using brick and water. Gypsum doesn't mess up your space. Clean work and fast pace are the advantages of gypsum products. With skilled labour you can cover a large space within a short span of

time. So particularly when one wants to move in quickly into their property, this would be the best solution. Also, if that customer wants to move out after two or three years and another person gets in and wants a different look and feel and lay out to the office, it is possible with gypsum boards. Progress is very fast. The concept is moving in that direction very fast, like modular furniture.

Can you tell us about your manufacturing facilities?

We have four manufacturing facilities spread across in Haryana, Chennai, Mumbai and Bangalore. The four plants have a total annual capacity of 40 million sq m of gypsum board, which is adequate to meet the demand for the next few years. Gypsum is a naturally occurring material.

Advantages of Drywall Construction

- Drywall construction has high quality GI stud framing
- It can take any surface decoration
- Drywalls are aesthetically more appealing allowing to experiment with shapes and sizes
- In drywall construction, the construction time is 30-40% faster and is non messy
- Drywalls are energy efficient and eco friendly in nature
- Drywalls are 8 to 10 times lighter than masonry systems
- Drywalls offer flexibility in creating and dividing spaces
- Drywalls offer excellent performances in terms of fire protection, sound insulation and thermal insulation

Deposits are found in Rajasthan. Apart from that huge deposits are found in Gulf areas such as in Iran, Oman etc. We take the raw material depending on the logistics cost. For example, if you bring something by sea, it travels 2,000 km, the cost is the same as 200 km by road. For Bangalore or Mumbai it makes more sense for us to focus on Iran or Oman rather than from Rajasthan even though physically the distance is very short. Once you put it in the roads and gets it, the cost becomes very different. We are open to looking at local markets as such. Our

plants are more located based on proximity to end markets and not based on raw material sources.

What are the challenges that you are facing while implementing the projects?

There are several challenges. The major challenge is that getting over the conventional mindset of people. Many people have a conventional mindset on how things have to be done. Something new is always viewed with a little bit of suspicion. It works in the western countries, but it won't work in India. That is the major challenge that we have in front of us. Typically we are into interior space. Once we start the project, several smaller projects need to be coordinated. If you are doing the walls then there are electrical works, plumbing and so on. These things should go simultaneously with the wall work. But what we have noticed is that others are not able to cope with the pace. We can complete the job quickly. Unless they finalise their plans, the entire project will lag by itself.

We also face problems related to the inconsistency of the clients in fixing a plan. In the West, people freeze out a plan and then go for it. Once you go with a certain approach, if you want to get that speed you have to make decisions in time. There is a lot of detailing that needs to go along with the designing. You freeze the design and then you will see the speed. You will not get the intended benefits of that material, if you are not doing things properly.