

Itoh Oil Chemicals: Unlocking the endless potential of castor oil

Environmentally friendly castor oil is quickly replacing the use of petrochemicals in the manufacturing of a wide range of products, from lubricants, plastics and paints, to cosmetics and pharmaceuticals.

The endless potential of castor oil has long been recognized by Itoh Oil Chemicals Company, which has been in the business of manufacturing high-quality castor oil-based products and derivatives since 1946 and boasts Japan's largest castor oil refinery.

But only in recent years, amid increasing environmental awareness, have many industries opened their eyes to the benefits of castor oil, particularly as a substitute for fossil-fuel based oils and lubricants.

Consumer trends for more environmentally friendly products has spurred increasing demand for castor oil and its derivatives in the manufacturing of everything from bio-based plastics, lubricants and specialty rubber, to paints and cosmetic products, while its medicinal properties have also prompted its rising utilization in the health and pharmaceutical industries.

Such demand bodes very well for Itoh Oil Chemicals, which has helped clients to unlock the potential of castor oil for almost 75 years. "We believe this growth is being driven by people's growing awareness of the magical properties of this product: it is biodegradable, natural, and ecologically friendly," says company president, Takuya Katayama.

"These traits are dragging a lot of industries into the production and use of castor oil. This is very promising for us. And we will promote our R&D on castor oil

and serve the global environment by looking for more solutions to replace petrochemicals."

Backed by the 75-year experience that has enabled Itoh Oil Chemicals to perfect its manufacturing processes and techniques, the company supplies the highest-quality, environmentally friendly products, which are used in various fields, such as the household, medicine, shipbuilding, automobile, construction and civil engineering industries. Unrefined castor oil arrives at Itoh's refinery from India, where the company constantly offers its expertise to oil millers in order to improve the quality of the raw material, and, ultimately, the final product.

In response to the latest demands, Itoh Oil Chemicals draws on its R&D prowess to develop new castor oil-based products for the cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and polyurethane industries. As the Tokyo-based firm looks to diversify into new markets, co-creation and customer engagement will remain key to its innovation and overall success. Aside from joint R&D with research institutes and universities, the company's commitment to listening and collaborating with clients is among its main strengths and competitive advantages.

"It is always important in any industry to try to engage with our customers. We drive our customer engagement through hearings that provide the benefits of castor oil. These hearings are essen-



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Takuya Katayama, President, Itoh Oil Chemicals Co., Ltd.

tial in order to receive customer feedback," explains Mr. Katayama. "It is especially important for us to know what the final product will be and then work with the customer to co-develop the castor oil product that would best meet the needs of their final product."

As the world confronts the monumental challenge posed by climate change, Itoh Oil Chemicals will play an important role as a

leading manufacturer of castor oil. Not only can castor oil be used to develop more environmentally friendly products and reduce consumption of fossil fuels, but cultivation of the castor plant from which it is derived also contributes to the reduction of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by absorbing these harmful gases.

With all of this in mind, Mr. Katayama, who took over as president in June, aims to take the company global, with a particular focus on fast-growing markets in Southeast Asia. To do so, Itoh Oil Chemicals seeks international partners with whom it can develop and distribute its products to a growing base of customers across a broad range of industries.

"We can provide the high-performance products and the best solutions by forming alliances with partners. They bring local knowledge, and we will bring the technological know-how," says Mr. Katayama. "In five years my goal is to expand the business area within mainland China so that we can get a stronger foothold there. Our sales performance there is looking promising."

"We also look to move past China as well and expand into more and more countries in Southeast Asia. Castor oil has more potential power in reducing environmental costs and improving the functionality of customers' products. Making the world know about our products is my most important job."

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