Infrared heat helps thermoforming bioplastics

Bioplastics are environmentally-friendly, not least because they are produced from renewable raw materials and are not petroleum-based. In addition, they are degradable and can be composted. Plantic Technologies Ltd has developed and patented a bioplastic made of vegetable starch from non-genetically engineered maize. This corn starch is used to manufacture trays, blisters and sorting inserts in chocolate packaging. To do this, the foil must be heated and then thermoformed. Usually, using conventional plastic foils, this takes place in several stages, each involving a few seconds heating, until the deformation temperature is achieved. However, properties such as strength, flexibility and stability of the corn starch foil can be detrimentally affected by long heat-up times. This is because water can leach from the foil in the heating process and this can lead to embrittlement.

In collaboration with Heraeus, Plantic investigated several possibilities in an effort to optimise the heating process. Short wave emitters demonstrated that they were particularly suitable for the task, as using high power, they could bring the foil to the deformation temperature of around 140°C in approximately two seconds. This is so fast that there is virtually no water loss. A heating module with overlapping emitter ends and several heating zones ensures a homogenous temperature distribution across the foil. Consequently, the forming process for corn starch foils is optimised and it has also been shown that reject rates at process start-up can be minimised.

**Features**

- Heating of plastic foils from corn starch prior to forming
- 140 °C in about 2 seconds

**Technical Data**

- short wave infrared heaters
- 1 module with overlapping emitter ends
- several heating zones, individually controlled
- control via touch screen

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**Germany**
Heraeus Noblelight GmbH
Infrared Process Technology
Reinhard-Heraeus-Ring 7
63801 Kleinostheim
Phone +49 6181 35-8545
Fax +49 6181 35-6410
hng-infrared@heraeus.com
www.heraeus-noblelight.com/Infrared

**USA**
Heraeus Noblelight America LLC
1520C Broadmoor Blvd.
Buford, GA 30518
Phone +1 678 835-5764
Fax: +1 678 835-5765
info.hna.ip@heraeus.com
www.heraeus-thermal-solutions.com

**Great Britain**
Heraeus Noblelight Ltd.
Clayhill Industrial Estate
Neston, Cheshire
CH64 3UZ
Phone +44 151 353-2710
Fax +44 151 353-2719
ian.bartley@heraeus.com
www.heraeus-infrarsolutions.co.uk

**China**
Heraeus Noblelight (Shenyang) LTD
2F, 5th Building 5
No. 406, GuLin Rd, Xuhui District
200233 Shanghai
Phone +8621 3357-5555
Fax +8621 3357-5333
info.hns@heraeus.com
www.heraeus-noblelight.cn