

100 years of Verband Deutscher Schleifmittelwerke e.V. (VDS) / Association of German Abrasive Manufacturers

On 17 January 1917, a group of dedicated abrasive manufacturers met in Berlin and founded the VDS (Association of German Abrasive Manufacturers). In the turmoil of the First World War, it was the aim of the founding members to pool their interests vis-à-vis state authorities, as scarcity of raw materials and energy threatened the existence of many companies. This marked the beginning of a success story which continues even to this day.

The association's office building in the Berliner Grolman Street was destroyed in a bombing attack in the Second World War together with all documents. After various locations, such as Offenbach on the Rhine, the VDS finally moved to Bonn in the late forties. The geographical proximity to the government was important for such a key industry.

And indeed, machining with geometrically undefined cutting edge, thus the cumbersome but very appropriate designation for grinding, has become indispensable in modern industrial society. Metal, wood, plastics, glass, natural stone, building material, even silk and leather were machined with abrasive products that were exactly adapted to the specific application. The industry is small, but the importance of abrasive products for the industrial users is enormous. Although it is actually an ancient production process. Quartz sand mixed with water or oil was used by Stone Age people in order to give their tools and weapons the desired form and surface. This was approximately 10.000 years ago.

Today, the VDS holds 57 members, among them also some based in Austria and Switzerland. And numerous topics run like a common thread through the now 100-year history of the VDS: Standardization of abrasives, protection of the user when grinding, collaboration with factory inspectorates, environmental issues and safety at work.

The pooling of members' interests and their representation vis-à-vis policy makers still remain one of the core tasks of the association. In order to reach these goals also on a European level, the VDS closely cooperates with the European Abrasive Manufacturers Association FEPA in Paris since 1955. In 1956, member companies of the VDS founded the Forschungsgemeinschaft Schleiftechnik (FGS) (German Research Association on Grinding Technology) which has set itself the goal of safeguarding the future of grinding in the long term through pre-competitive collective research in cooperation with universities and research institutes. Since then, more than 170 research projects have been implemented, and many former diploma students and postgraduates are now working in executive positions at technology companies and are using their acquired knowledge to find out how to solve difficult machining tasks through grinding.

Finally, in the year 2000, it was thanks to the dedication of 12 VDS members in cooperation with further European abrasive manufacturers that the globally active Organization for the Safety of Abrasives (oSa) was founded. The oSa now holds 55 members who have committed themselves to manufacture abrasive products in line with the highest safety requirements. The work is provided on an agency basis by the VDS.

In the year of its one hundredth anniversary, the Verband Deutscher Schleifmittelwerke proves that a production technology that is in fact thousands of years old still has a justified existence if entrepreneurship, courage and power of innovation are the driving forces. Following a vivid history, the circle will close for the VDS when in September 2017 its members will meet at the place of its foundation in Berlin in order to appropriately celebrate its 100-year success story.

Bonn, December 2016