

Press Release

Philippsthal (Germany), January 18, 2024

One billion tonnes of crude salt extracted from the Hattorf-Wintershall mine

K+S Werra potash plant celebrates outstanding production anniversary

It's an anniversary of a special kind: one billion tonnes of crude salt have been extracted from the Hattorf-Wintershall mine of the K+S Werra potash plant in eastern Hesse since 1903. The billionth tonne was brought to the surface during the midday shift on January 18, 2024. If the total quantity were loaded onto bulk goods railcars, the train would reach around the equator seven and a half times.

“Many generations of miners have contributed to celebrating this outstanding mining anniversary today,” says Plant Manager Gerd Kübler. “We are proud of this achievement, with which our employees underground and above ground have been helping to feed a growing world population for 120 years, even though the area under cultivation is constantly decreasing.” Almost half of the potash products manufactured in the EU come from the K+S Werra plant with its two active mines and three factory sites. From there, they are delivered all over the world by train and vessel.

“Our mineral treasure can be found in over 10,000 different products. All of us come into contact with them every day,” says Kübler. The minerals are indispensable basic materials for industry, for high-purity salts in medicine, and for fertilizers. Alongside nitrogen and phosphorus, potassium is one of the three most important plant nutrients essential for achieving the optimum crop yields in agriculture. In particular, it ensures better plant tolerance to drought and water shortages, which is becoming increasingly important in light of climate change and the associated weather extremes.



Mining began at the Grimberg shaft in the summer of 1903

Potash mining on the Hessian side of the Werra-Fulda region began with the sinking of the Grimberg shaft in Heringen by the Wintershall mining union and the extraction of the first tonne of crude salt in the summer of 1903. Five years later, the Hattorf mine in neighboring Philippsthal, which was still separate at the time, began production. The two mines have been connected since 1979. They now cover a combined area of around 150 square kilometers. The crude salt is extracted from the rock by drilling and blasting on two levels and transported through the Grimberg and Hattorf shafts to the Wintershall (Heringen) and Hattorf (Philippsthal) factories, where the valuable materials potassium and magnesium are separated from the non-usable part (rock salt and other secondary minerals).

Technical innovations such as the electrostatic separation system (ESTA) patented by K+S and high levels of investment have enabled us to continuously reduce the environmental impact of potash mining. "In the past 15 years alone, we have invested around one billion euros in environmental measures, and with the Werra 2060 project, we will fundamentally transform potash production in the Werra Valley to supply agriculture with green potash," says Kübler. Werra 2060 stands for sustainable potash mining in the Werra Valley and will help to significantly reduce the CO2 footprint of production, the generation of liquid residues and the storage of solid residues on tailings piles.

Prospects into the 2060s

The future of mining in the Werra Valley stretches from the Eitra Valley southwards over an area of around 100 square kilometers to the gates of Fulda. "We can therefore supply our sites with crude salt until the 2060s, provide work for future generations in Hesse and Thuringia in the Werra-Ulster region, remain a reliable partner for the region and continue to help feeding the world," says Kübler.



About K+S and the Werra plant

We make an important contribution to society: We enable farmers securing the world's food supply. Our products keep numerous industries running. We enrich consumers' daily lives and ensure safety in winter. With around 11,000 employees, production sites on two continents, and a global distribution network, we are a reliable partner for our customers. At the same time, we are realigning ourselves: We are focusing even more strongly than before on fertilizers and specialties. We are becoming leaner, more cost-efficient, more digital, and more performance-oriented. On a solid financial basis, we are tapping into new markets and business models. We are committed to our responsibility towards society and the environment in all regions in which we operate. Learn more about K+S at www.kpluss.com.

The Werra integrated plant with its sites in Hattorf and Wintershall in Hesse and Unterbreizbach, and Merkers in Thuringia is the largest site of K+S Minerals and Agriculture GmbH. Besides fertilizers, the Werra potash plant also produces preliminary products for a wide range of technical and industrial applications as well as for the pharmaceutical, food, and animal feed industries. It employs almost 4400 people, including 300 trainees. This makes it an important employer and training company in the triangle of towns between Bad Hersfeld, Bad Salzungen, and Eisenach. Furthermore, it is an important client for the local small and medium-sized businesses and makes a significant contribution to value creation in the region. This makes it a key component for the economic and demographic development of the East Hesse/West Thuringia region.

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