

How privacy strips are made



Privacy strips are strips made out of (durable) plastic. These strips are used for temporarily or permanently filling up chain link or mesh panel fencing, primarily in gardens. The strips are extruded. This is a continuous process that consists of various steps. Ekon, a Dutch manufacturer of polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) plastic sheet material from Born, in the province of Limburg, is giving us a look behind the scenes.



Material

"It starts with the choice of the material that is used for the privacy strips," says Jos van Ham, project manager at Ekon. "Our privacy strips are made out of polyethylene or polypropylene. These materials come to us as a transparent granulate. We pre-mix these grains with various aggregates, like a colourant and a UV stabilizer. This way we add the right characteristics to the raw material."

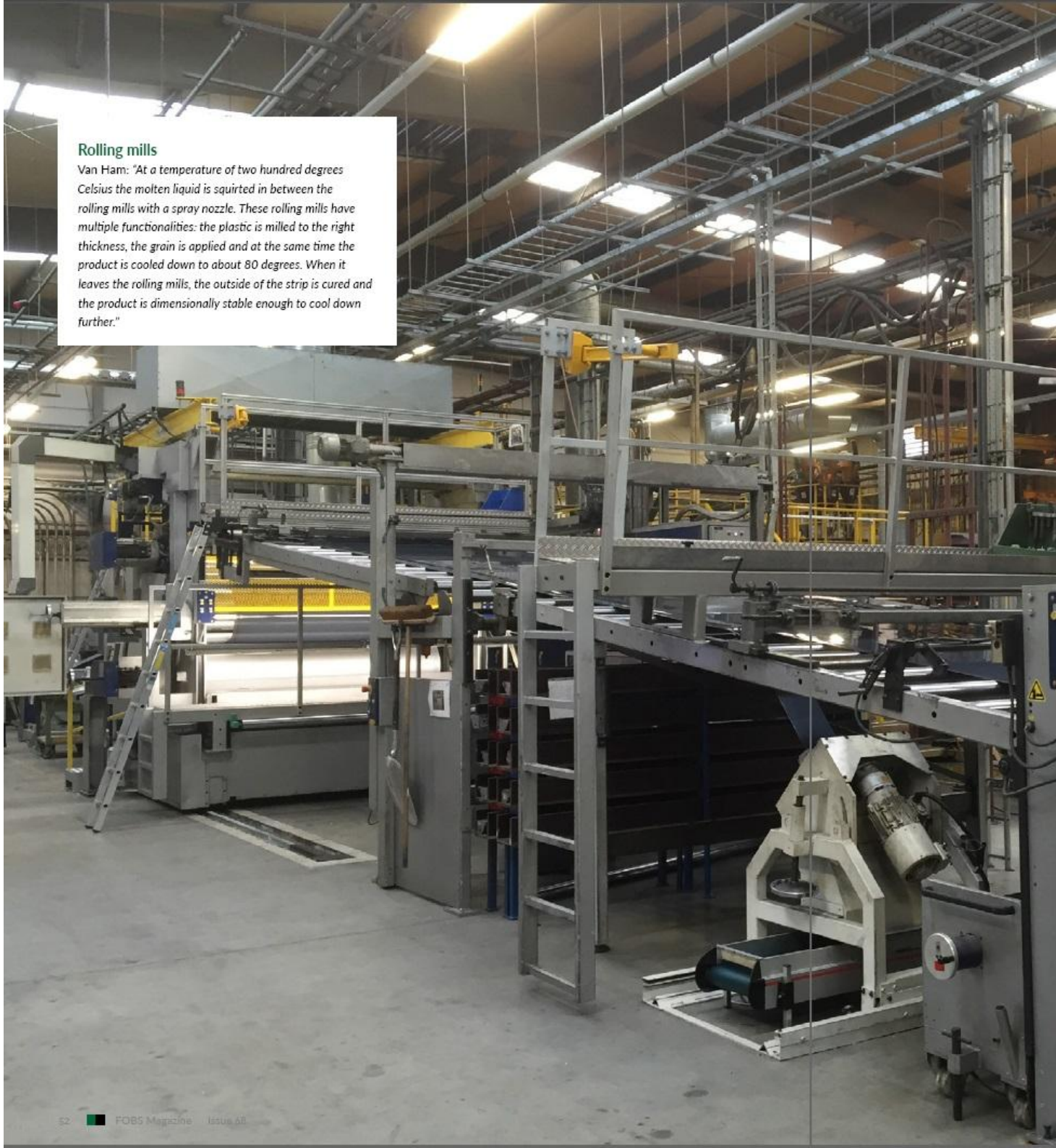
Extruder

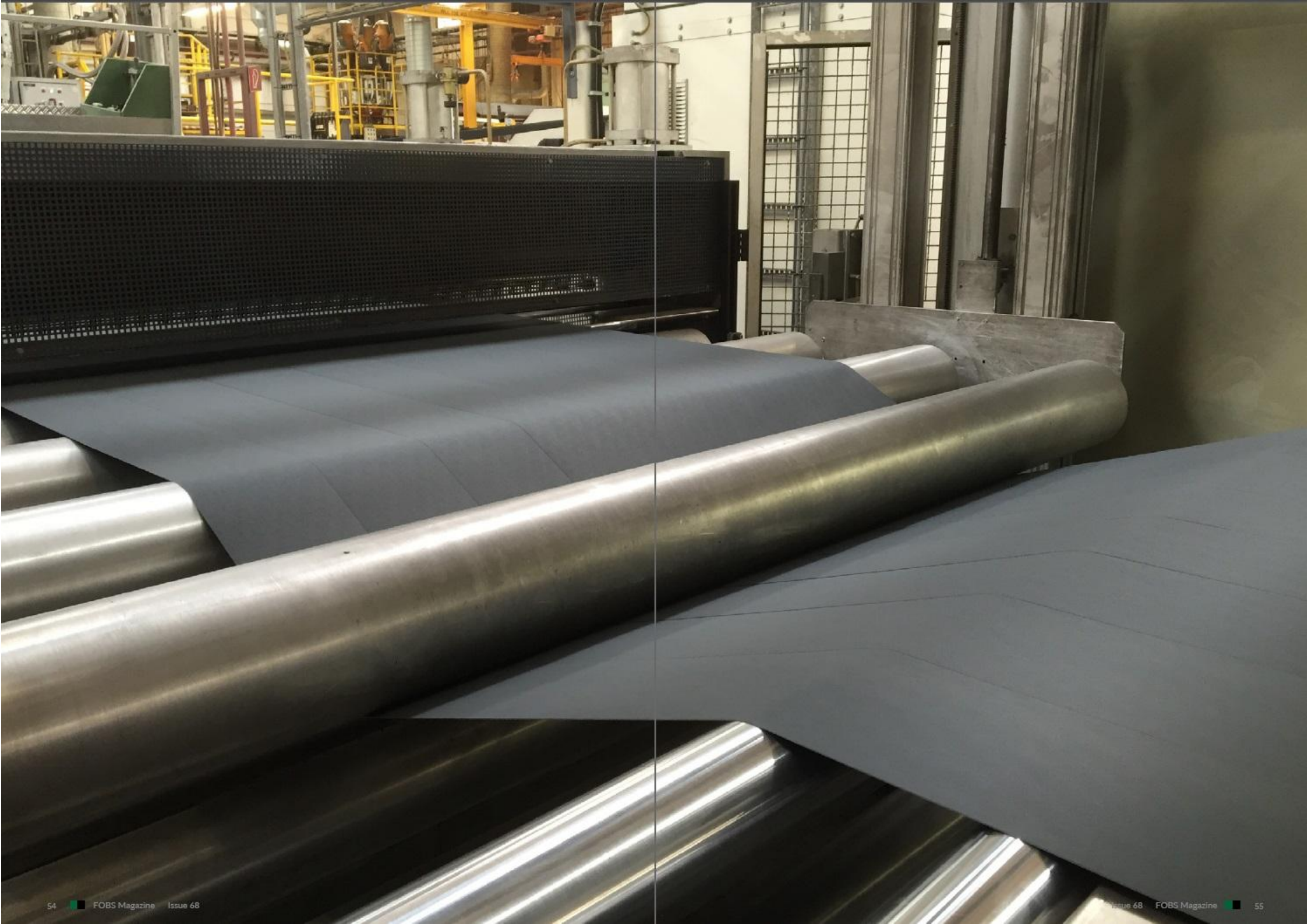
Van Ham continues: "Subsequently the mixture goes through a funnel to the extruder. This is a large propeller that rotates inside a cylinder. The material is compressed and warmed up there. At the end of the extruder, the material is melted and it resembles chewing gum."



Rolling mills

Van Ham: "At a temperature of two hundred degrees Celsius the molten liquid is squirted in between the rolling mills with a spray nozzle. These rolling mills have multiple functionalities: the plastic is milled to the right thickness, the grain is applied and at the same time the product is cooled down to about 80 degrees. When it leaves the rolling mills, the outside of the strip is cured and the product is dimensionally stable enough to cool down further."





Cutting

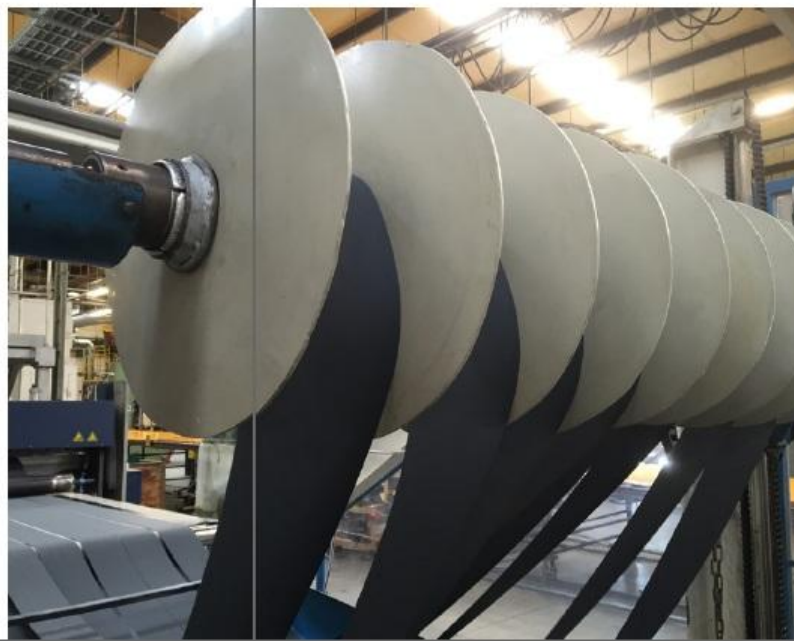
"After it leaves the rolling mills, the product arrives at a 25-metre roller conveyor. Here it gets the chance to cool down even further. Halfway through the conveyor the material is cut to the desired width. At the end of the conveyor the product has cooled down to approximately 25 degrees. It is rolled onto a shaft on a winding machine. The shaft is removed later on in the process. The length of the rolls is automatically measured and when the right length has been reached, the strip is cut. The ends of the rolls are secured through stapling."

24/7

"Manufacturing our plastic sheet material is an ongoing process. Starting and stopping the machines costs time and money. That is why we have a 5-shift system, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The only time the process is stopped is between Christmas and New Year, so maintenance can be done," says Van Ham.

Ekoshield

Ekon offers a line of privacy strips under the name of 'Ekoshield'. It is supplied on a roll and available in standard dimensions for various kinds of chain-link fencing (47 mm) and welded mesh panels (190 mm). The standard colours are green, grey and black. Other colours and dimensions are available on request.



Durable

"Ekon has been manufacturing privacy strips since 1996," says Van Ham. "This is a durable alternative. Because we use an environmentally friendly plastic that has a longer lifespan than other materials, such as wood. Besides, our material does not fade in the sun and it is maintenance-friendly." ■

About Ekon

Ekon started out as an extrusion company in 1992. In 2002 the company became part of Royal Lankhorst Euronete, a manufacturer of synthetic rope, industrial yarns and specialty products. Meanwhile Ekon has built up a wide product range, both in new materials and regenerate (recycled plastic). Through a network of distributors Ekon supplies products in divergent markets, among which are intensive farming, construction, the packaging industry and the automotive industry.



Jos van Ham, project manager at Ekon



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