

Chemical Companies

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To Expand Neal Sites

Two chemical plants located in Neal announced plans earlier this month to expand their operations.

Aristech Chemical Corp. and Ashland Chemical Co. have both begun expansion projects that are scheduled for completion sometime in 1988. The plants are located south of Kenova on Route 52 along the Big Sandy River.

Aristech will spend more than \$20 million to update and expand its production capacity by early next year. The firm produces polypropylene, a plastic used in fibers, packaging, medicine, automobiles and appliance parts. The modernization will increase production capacity to 264 million pounds annually.

No new employees are expected to be added to the 220-man workforce, but a company spokesman said expansion "ensures the long-term viability of the plant." Aristech, a company headquartered in Pittsburgh, includes the former chemical operations of U.S. Steel, which is now known as USX. The company has 11 plants in eight states and another polypropylene plant in LaPorte, Texas.

U.S. Senators Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller and Congressman Nick Rahall all praised the expansion as "a strong commitment to West Virginia."

"The jobs created as a result of construction work and permanent workers once the remodeling is complete will help boost the Wayne County economy," Rahall said.

Rockefeller said that investment is necessary. "Aristech is making an investment in the future of West

Virginia -- the kind of investment our industries need to stay competitive," he said.

The Governor's Office of Community and Industrial Development had been helping with the expansion project since 1985. The plant was originally opened in 1956.

Ashland Chemical Co. announced that it will expand its maleic anhydride manufacturing plant by mid-1988. The expansion will increase the plant's production capacity by 40 percent to approximately 65 million pounds per year. The project's cost was not announced.

Peter M. Bokach, vice president and general manager of Ashland's Petrochemical Division, said that although the expansion anticipates some continued increase in the demand for maleic anhydride, it is the existing plant's flexible design that makes this capacity addition possible in the current market.

"The Neal plant was originally designed to be expanded in phases to a total capacity of 90 million pounds," Bokach said.

"This expansion represents the first logical step toward realizing the Neal plant's full production capabilities.

"In the meantime, we've used the plant's design flexibility to upgrade technology and improve the consistent quality of our product for the benefit of our customers."

Ashland Chemical, a division of Ashland Oil Inc., is a producer and distributor of chemicals and specialty chemicals for industry.