AK Steel to receive grant to develop new grade of steel

Butler County-based steelmaker AK Steel will receive a $1.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop a new grade of steel to make electric motors more energy efficient.

Mark Johnson, director of the Advanced Manufacturing Office in the DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, said the goal is to "use our resources most effectively as possible. That means you need to develop new technologies."

AK Steel was one of 13 recipients awarded a total of $25 million, including American Superconductor Corp., Purdue University and the University of Houston. All of them will be challenged to solve the need for a more efficient motor, Johnson said.

Butler County Democratic Chair Jocelyn Bucaro, in a prepared statement, praised the Obama Administration for understanding how to partner with American manufacturers to "develop the next generation of products that lower energy costs for businesses and consumers and make American manufacturing strong and competitive globally."

Johnson said Butler County has seen the number of unemployed and the unemployment rate itself reduced by over half as the number of people employed here has grown under the Obama Administration.

"This is great news for our region and the future of American manufacturing," he said.

Energy for electric motors constitutes nearly a quarter of all U.S. electricity consumption, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The Fortune 500 company AK Steel Holding Corp. is headquartered in West Chester Twp. Between operations in West Chester and the Middletown Works steel plant, AK Steel employs approximately 2,400 full-time workers in Butler County, making it the county's third-largest employer. AK Steel facilities in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Minnesota employ more than 8,000 altogether and produce flat-rolled carbon, electrical and stainless steels used by the automotive, appliance, construction and manufacturing markets.

Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal, Nisshin Steel transferring trade rights

Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal and Nisshin Steel are transferring trade rights for certain operations to competitors, it was reported aiming to smooth the way for the former's acquisition of the latter.

Antitrust watchdogs abroad have already cleared the takeover. Nippon Steel hopes to conduct a tender offer for Nisshin this coming February and turn the company into a subsidiary. Japan's Fair Trade Commission is expected to grant provisional approval before the end of the month.

After announcing its bid for Nisshin this past February, Nippon Steel applied to the FTC for antitrust review. The commission determined that the two companies control too much market share in stainless steel sheet and in other sheet products coated with alloys combining zinc, aluminum and magnesium. It asked the duo to resolve the issues before moving forward with the deal.

Nisshin sells the product under the ZAM brand, while Nippon Steel offers the SuperDyma catalog.

Nippon Steel and Nisshin have agreed to transfer commercial rights for the ZAM brand, with Kobe Steel seen as the potential new holder. Nippon Steel plans to maintain SuperDyma, positioned as a global brand, as an earnings source and safeguard the proprietary anti-corrosion technology.

Before merging with Sumitomo Metal, the old Nippon Steel tried to consolidate stainless steel operations with those of Nisshin back in 2009. The plans were abandoned at the end of 2010 over resistance from the FTC.

Nippon Steel seeks to lift its 8.3% equity stake in Nisshin to 51%. Simple arithmetic shows the bid likely costing some JPY 76 billion (USD 651 million). Nisshin would remain listed, and the duo would reorganise and cut costs to compete in an international business environment that has grown less forgiving.

EU to set duties on imports of concrete reinforcements rods from Belarus

European Union will set duties on imports of concrete reinforcement rods and bars from Belarus to counter what it considers are excessively cheap prices. EU's official journal said that the bloc will impose duties of 12.5 percent on rebar from the BMZ Byelorussian Steel Works and any other producers in the country.

The European Commission launched an investigation in March following a complaint by the European Steel Association. It has now decided provisional duties are appropriate for Belarus to prevent damage to the industry. The investigation will continue for a further six months. Definitive duties, which would normally be in place for five years, would have to be set by June 20.

The EU's official journal said import volumes of the product from Belarus almost tripled from 2012 to 2015, reaching 5% of the EU market, as prices fell by some 25%. Imports in 2015 were worth around 180 million euros (USD 187 million)