Competitive horizons

Global demand for steel predicted to be weak

Recovery in the worldwide steel market is set to be sluggish, a report published by www.americanmachinist.com claims. Industry body the World Steel Market expects growth of 0.5 per cent in 2017 to reach 1.501 billion metric tons. Weak investment resulting from tensions and conflicts in several parts of the world are offered as reasons for the fragile expansion in the sector. Growth in the developed world is expected to be generally weak. The strong US dollar and ongoing uncertainties about Brexit are just two factors continuing to impact on demand. Instability in the EU is further affected by the refugee crisis in the Middle East. Currency appreciation and structural challenges are impacting on steel consumption in Japan. However, the report notes that demand in China is set to be stronger than forecast. The most positive finding is that the market for steel in other developing and emerging nations is set to increase by 4.0 per cent in 2017. Recent declines in demand for steel in countries including Russia, Mexico, South America and parts of the Middle East could begin to reverse as a consequence of the slight rise in oil prices.

Traffic light labeling can influence consumer food purchases, study claims

Researchers in Germany and the USA have found that using color-coded labels on food products can steer consumers to make healthier choices. Their findings showed that decisions tend to be based more on nutritional qualities than taste when the practice is adopted. As reported by www.foodnavigator.com, how the information is presented significantly influences consumer response. Taste preferences seem to be the primary consideration when information-based labels are used alone. However, the probability of selecting healthier alternatives increases massively when this information about such as weights and ingredients is combined with the red, yellow and green traffic light labeling system. The effects become even greater when the color-coded label relates to multiple rather than single nutrients.

Demand for plastic films set to grow over next five years

According to Smithers Rapra, the market for plastic films is set to grow by an average of 4 per cent each year through to 2021. Worldwide demand by this time is expected to reach 73.3 million tons, the rubber, plastics and composites firm points out. The report, as published by www.prw.com, cites various factors as influencing market development. Among the different trends predicted to be significant are economic factors and changes to demographics and lifestyles. In addition, the report points out that new materials and packaging technologies are expected to emerge. Consumer demand for less packaging is recognized as a key issue but plastic films have the advantage of generating little waste relative to more rigid alternative films. However, the existence of bans and charges are expected to result in lower growth in plastic bags during the period in question.

China's insurance market seen as having even stronger growth potential

Considerable scope exists for further robust growth in China's booming insurance sector, a report published by www.chinadaily.com claims. The country's population is 1.3 billion, yet there are currently just 330 million who hold policies. Additional room for expansion is evidenced by the limited choice in terms of the number of insurance companies and products at present. Income from insurance premiums reached $287.9bn in the first half of 2016, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 37.3 per cent. Demand for insurance products is being driven largely by China's soaring number of middle-class consumers who boast increasing spending power. Continued strong growth in demand will see China overtake Japan as the world's second largest insurance market within a matter of months. The report also notes the fierce competition among insurers operating in the Chinese market and states that foreign companies must be innovative or financially strong in order to succeed.

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