

COMPANY PROFILE

SUN CHEMICAL | BY COUNCIL OF INDUSTRY STAFF

A WORLD OF COLOR: EFFECT PIGMENT INNOVATION



Sun Chemicals portfolio offers exciting ranges of pearlescent color options for their customers. Pictured above is a glimpse of several products the Sun Chemical Peekskill site has to offer to service the Automotive, Cosmetic and Industrial markets.



We often say that the manufacturing sector in the Hudson Valley is rich and diverse. Firms in our region produce a wide range of products – from the familiar like semiconductors, mainframe computers and bakery supplies – to the less familiar such as wax room equipment, pneumatic seals and ferrite cores.



Sun Chemical Peekskill Site Leadership Team. Front Left: Dave Roberts, Operations Manager, Front Center: Gary Hutchison, Site Director, Front Right: Geoff English, Operational Excellence Coordinator, Back Left: Bill Dolack, Site Controller, Back Right: Ben Pells, Quality Manager.

This edition's company profile is of a firm that manufactures products that most of us have never heard of, yet we see them, and use them, in a variety of ways every day of our lives. The Company is Sun Chemical and the product is effect pigments.

Sun Chemical's Peekskill site, with its rich history dating back to 1952, stands as a beacon of innovation and excellence in the production of effect pigments. Nestled near the Hudson River, its 24-acre facility has evolved through decades of change to become a critical player in global pigment production. From its beginnings under the Mearl Corporation to its current role as part of Sun Chemical, the Peekskill site exemplifies resilience, innovation, and a commitment to quality.

■ WHAT IS AN EFFECT PIGMENT?

Effect pigments are material colorants that give additional color effects, such as angular color dependence or texture, when applied in an application medium. Effect pigments reflect light in unique ways to produce color variations, luster, sparkle, shimmer and more. Two-dimensional metallic pigments use small, flat pieces of metal to reflect light and produce a luster. Metallic flake pigments can be solvent- or waterborne and have either leafing or non-leafing flakes.

Sun Chemical Color Materials in Peekskill offers a broad portfolio of colorants to meet the individual needs and requirements of customers in the coatings, cosmetics, plastics, printing and specialties markets. These include natural and synthetic mica and borosilicate glass-based pigments.

■ FROM NATURAL PEARLS TO GLOBAL IMPACT

The journey of the Peekskill site began in 1925 when Burton Turner and Henry Mattin operated a natural pearl pigment factory in Eastport, Maine. By 1933, the two men officially formed the Mearl Corporation, laying the groundwork for a company that would become synonymous with high-quality pigments.

The company saw its ups and downs throughout the 1930s and 40s but the ultimate trajectory was one of growth. In 1952, Mearl opened the Peekskill facility and it quickly was established as the primary pigment production site for the company. Over the decades, the site transitioned through various ownerships — Engelhard Corporation in 1996, BASF in 2006 and finally Sun Chemical in 2021.

No matter the owner, Peekskill has always been home to world-class pigment production, research and development. Each chapter of its history has been marked by growth and adaptation including notable milestones such as the start of iridescent film production in 1978 and the introduction of oxide-coated mica pigments, which remain a cornerstone of Peekskill's output today.

Site Director Gary Hutchison notes that with each transition, the site has embraced new challenges and opportunities, solidifying its reputation as a leader in effect pigments. "This site is known within the pigment industry as a leader in R&D and quality. From the very beginning in the early 1950s to today Peekskill is on the cutting edge of effect pigment innovation."

■ A HUB FOR RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND PRODUCTION

The Peekskill site is not just a manufacturing facility; it is a hub for innovation and precision. Its expertise lies in producing effect pigments, which are used across industries like cosmetics, automotive finishes, and high-end coatings.

Hutchison ticks off some of the capabilities of the Peekskill site and its team.

“Our site has plenty of the industry’s most advanced equipment, all of which are computer controlled and monitored. Our experienced operators can handle the most complex production processes.”

Those processes are used to make over 500 unique products, with many requiring multiple coatings and long production cycles. “Some of those cycles can take weeks to perform depending on what raw material we are using and what the customer’s desired color and effect is,” Hutchison says.

Just as important as the company’s expertise in the process of making the pigments is their materials expertise. To produce the desired outcomes Sun Chemical’s engineers work with many raw material inputs, including natural mica, synthetic mica, borosilicate glass flake, nitric acid, ferric chloride and titanium oxychloride. Each, when processed in certain ways, will produce a different color and effect.

In close coordination with local process development teams, most new effect pigments are scaled up and commercialized at the Peekskill site. This emphasis on innovation ensures that Sun Chemical remains at the forefront of the pigments industry.

“There are so many different combinations and formulations,” Hutchison adds. “But we are capable of more and our team is always working with customers to develop new ones.”

■ A LOCAL SITE WITH CUSTOMERS WORLDWIDE

While deeply rooted in the Hudson Valley, the Peekskill site’s impact extends far beyond. Serving markets in North America, Europe, Asia and South America, the facility is a global player in the pigments industry. This global footprint underscores the site’s importance in meeting the diverse needs of its international clientele.

From plastics and consumer products to automotive coatings, printing and personal care products, customers come from nearly all sectors of the economy. Their products may well be in your eye shadow, the paint on your car, the ink in your magazine and the fabric on your sofa.

The diverse portfolio provides opportunities for growth, as well as some protection from economic downturn. Frequently when one sector is down, another is up, providing a modicum of stability.

■ RESILIENCE AMID CHANGE

Operating in a dynamic industry, Sun Chemical’s Peekskill site has faced its share of challenges. From navigating supply chain disruptions to adapting to inflationary pressures, the facility has demonstrated remarkable resilience. Investments in advanced technologies, sustainable practices, and employee development have helped the site maintain its competitive edge.

The team’s commitment to quality and innovation ensures they remain agile in the face of industry changes. By focusing on long-term goals and steady growth, the Peekskill site continues to thrive despite external pressures.

■ WORKFORCE IS THE KEY TO QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Key to the success of the site is its high performing team of employees. A wide range of skills and talent work to ensure that each process making each product is designed and executed to the highest level of precision. From engineers and technicians to operators, material handlers and quality assurance technicians, every one of Sun Chemicals’ Peekskill employees work together to minimize waste and ensure that the highest quality products are delivered to customers.

“We have some great people here who are highly skilled and very dedicated to their



The Laboratory testing of Sun Chemical’s products is vital to our customers success. Pictured above Ava Fashaw, Quality Control Lab Technician, checks to ensure our pearlescent product is free from contaminants prior to being approved for packaging.



R&D and Production starts in the lab. Here Renee Barney, Chemist, samples a lab coating run as it progresses to completion for one of our newest additions to the exciting colors the Sun Chemical Peekskill Site has to offer.

Because so much can go wrong with batches making their way through the process a great emphasis is placed on quality and quality monitoring. Samples are drawn and tested throughout the process to ensure accuracy.

There are several quality labs on the factory floor where quality assurance technicians are constantly sampling and testing to ensure the quality of the batch. "It's mostly science but there's also a little art to it as well." Hutchison says. "The techs can look at a sample and see that the batch may need to spend more time in the reactor or maybe the temperature needs to be lowered slightly. Ultimately our customers expect a certain

jobs," Hutchison says. "Their commitment to safety and quality is why we are the industry leader."

color and effect from our product and our team is here to make sure they get it."

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SAFETY FIRST AND ALWAYS

Workplace safety is integrated into everything that happens at Sun Chemical's Peekskill site. From entering and exiting the parking lot and the buildings to the handling of chemicals and equipment, the safety of the employees is the first consideration. All employees don personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety glasses, steel-toed shoes and respirators where appropriate. Safety reminders are everywhere throughout the facility and all visitors receive a safety presentation and must pass a quiz to be allowed to tour the plant.

"We take safety very seriously. It is incorporated into every aspect of the operation," Hutchison said. "For our team safety is second nature – but we never assume and are always vigilant."

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The company faces a number of challenges as it looks to the future. One challenge comes in the form of competition from Asian firms that undercut pricing due to lower labor costs and less stringent environmental regulations. Another significant challenge facing the Peekskill operation is finding the skilled workers necessary to not only grow the business but replace retiring skilled engineers and operators. The site currently has several openings for technical positions and is facing challenges filling those roles.

"To become a truly skilled operator takes a certain amount of aptitude, a great attitude, and time." Hutchison says. "We have several openings right now and are also looking at several dozen retirements from key positions in the coming years. Our challenge is to fill those positions with the right people."

SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE

As Sun Chemical looks to the future of the Peekskill site, its focus remains on refining its product lines and exploring new opportunities for innovation. The company is committed to sustaining the legacy of excellence established by generations before, while also embracing the challenges of a rapidly changing industry.

"We're going to continue to run our path slow and steady," says Gary Hutchison, Peekskill Site Director for Sun Chemical. "With the dedication we have in our employees, the products we turn out, and the customer service we provide, I believe we provide great value to our customers."

Sun Chemical's Peekskill site, like so many other Hudson Valley manufacturers, is a global leader in its field, hidden in plain sight. Its effect pigments are found in products we use every day from cosmetics and plastics to automotive paint and inks. So next time you notice the really cool paint on that car in the parking lot, or the shimmer in the eyeshadow on the model in the fashion show, think to yourself "I bet that effect came from Peekskill."

Through its dedication to innovation, sustainability and community, the site is well-positioned to continue its legacy of excellence for decades to come.

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