Project Overview

Kunshan Zhong Yan Company, located in Kunshan City in China’s Jiangsu province, manufactures 600,000 tons of sodium carbonate (also known as “soda ash”) per year. Sodium carbonate serves multiple purposes in both domestic and industrial applications - widely used as a water softener, as a component in the manufacture of glass, a common additive used in swimming pools, and as an ingredient in certain foods, just to name a few.

The Challenge

In order to meet stringent water reuse standards, the Kunshan plant set out to find a cost-effective solution to treat its reverse osmosis (RO) concentrate and improve overall RO system recovery. Ultimately, the company’s goal was to achieve zero liquid discharge (ZLD), recycling treated water back into the process stream and reducing the amount of concentrate that is ultimately routed to the evaporator/crystallization system.

The Berghof Membranes solution

The Kunshan Zhong Yan plant contracted Berghof Membranes (BMT) to install its unique tubular ultrafiltration (UF) membranes, becoming the first commercial plant in China to use tubular membrane technology in soda ash production. The original system requirements called for a treatment capacity of 2,784 m³/day, a flux of 150 l/m²/h (LMH) and a crossflow rate 3.0 m/s. The Berghof Membrane system was designed with a total of 12 modules installed in two skids. In each skid, six modules are connected in series using Berghof’s 5mm-diameter PVDF tubular UF membranes which are rated to a maximum operating temperature of 60° Celsius to withstand rigorous Clean-In-Place (CIP) procedures.

Project Details

| Location: | Jiansu Kunshan, China |
| OEM Partner: | Nanjing Centre Electricity |
| Product: | Tubular UF membranes |
| Produced permeate: | 2,784 m³/day |
| Membrane type: | 5mm PVDF, chemical resistant, non-backwashable |

Picture 1. Setup of the tubular UF membranes
Customer Benefits

The tubular UF membranes from Berghof Membranes proved to be an effective and efficient method in improving overall recovery from Kunshan’s RO system and producing less concentrate that, in turn, required less energy for the plant’s evaporation/crystallization process.

- High flux of 134-145 LMH
- Feed capacity of 2,784 m³/day
- Variable crossflow velocity to minimize energy consumption
- Robust PVDF tubular UF membranes rated to maximum of 60° Celsius
- Integrated intelligent software automatically adjusts system parameters to minimize fouling
- Double-loop skid design to reduce CAPEX and OPEX

The B-SMART™ System

Based on a side-stream ultrafiltration system located outside the bioreactor (the external principle), the Berghof Membranes B-SMART self-regulating system uses high-quality tubular membrane modules. The system is self-regulating and therefore consumes less energy. The proprietary built-in software system analyses data in real time using advanced algorithms based on transmembrane pressure (TMP) to control pump speed, backwash and cleaning frequency. The filtration system automatically monitors the individual TMP and automatically initiates the cleaning procedure if it exceeds defined limits as a result of fouling. Depending on the need, the system selects one of the cleaning modes to eliminate fouling: (1) increased crossflow velocity, (2) backwash with- or without chemicals, or (3) flushing or cleaning-in-place (CIP). Once cleaning is completed, the system automatically checks the TMP values again and applies additional cleaning protocols if the set-point value is not reached. Additionally, the unit can continue to produce a fixed amount of permeate even during the backwash process. The Berghof Membranes B-SMART self-regulating external filtration sytem treats wastewater streams at a cross-flow velocity of 1.5 – 2.5 m/s and a flux range of 50 – 100 LMH. All this combined ensures less energy, reduced maintenance time and improved OPEX.