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The Rubber Letter

Prices at a nine-year high (232 cts/kg), monsoon in Asia and butadiene up 36%: a summer under pressure.



FROM THE EDITOR

Natural rubber prices are trading close to nine-year highs, and the summer looks decisive: monsoon in South-East Asia, the Ivorian harvest ramping up and soaring synthetic materials are redrawing the balance.

For sealing manufacturers, this is the moment to secure supply and prepare for shutdown periods.

KEY FIGURES

232 cts/kg

Nine-year high reached by rubber in May 2026

15.6 Mt

Global demand in 2026, against 15.2 Mt of production

+45 %

Rise in rubber prices year on year

Industry news

MARKET

Prices at their highest in nine years

Futures are trading around 220–225 US cents/kg after a peak at 232 cents in May. A sixth consecutive year of deficit: global demand remains above supply.

WEATHER

Monsoon disrupts tapping in Asia

Heavy rain in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam: fewer tapping days, degraded latex, slower factories. Côte d'Ivoire is fortunately entering its peak harvest season.

SYNTHETICS

Butadiene soars 36%

The rise in naphtha prices, linked to tension in the Strait of Hormuz, is pushing butadiene up in Shanghai. NBR and SBR elastomers are seeing production costs rise.

AUTOMOTIVE

China drives EV tyre demand

Purchase incentives for electric vehicles are supporting consumption. Heavier batteries and instant torque accelerate tyre wear — a recurring effect on demand.

Trends & outlook

01

Africa on the rise

Côte d'Ivoire is investing in local processing; Africa shows the fastest market growth (≈ 8%/year through 2031).

02

Natural vs synthetic substitution

Surging petrochemical grades give natural rubber a temporary cost advantage in mixed formulations.

03

Strategic stocks

With a fragile supply-demand balance, buyers are building buffer stocks ahead of the September industrial peak season.

04

Summer maintenance

July–August shutdowns are the ideal moment to replace ageing seals and gaskets preventively.

TECHNICAL TIP OF THE MONTH

Replacing seals successfully during the summer shutdown

01

Audit before dismantling

Inventory critical sealing points (flanges, pumps, cylinders) and record dimensions and materials before the shutdown so you can order without urgency.

02

Mind the heat

Above 120 °C continuously, prefer FKM or silicone to EPDM or NBR; check chemical compatibility with the fluids in service.

03

Store correctly

Keep elastomers away from light, ozone and heat (ISO 2230): a badly stored seal can lose its properties before it is even fitted.

DID YOU KNOW?

A rubber tree produces latex for 25 to 30 years and is tapped only every other day. Now Africa's leading producer, Côte d'Ivoire exports more than 1.8 million tonnes of natural rubber a year — enough to weigh increasingly on world prices.

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