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This information is based on our present state of knowledge and is intended to provide general notes on our products and their uses. It should not therefore be construed as a warranty of specific properties of the products described or a warranty for fitness for a particular purpose.

Classified according to EU Directive 1999/45/EC  
For further information see our "Material Safety Data Sheets".

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The latest revised edition of this brochure is the English version,  
which is always published on our web site [www.uddeholm.com](http://www.uddeholm.com)



SS-EN ISO 9001  
SS-EN ISO 14001

## Why strive for a high surface finish?

The increased use of plastic products has created a higher demand for mirror finish of moulding tools. The highest demands for surface finish are in the optical lens mould where an extreme requirement on polishability is desired.

However, in general there are other advantages with high surface finish, including:

- **Easier ejection of the plastic parts from the moulding tool** (applies to most plastics)
- **Reduced risk of local corrosion**
- **Reduced risk of fracture or cracking** due to temporary over loading or pure fatigue.

This brochure reviews the factors that affect the polishability of mould steels and gives recommendations on how to economically obtain the required finish on the main steel grades used. In making these recommendations, it is recognized that the skill, experience and technique of the polisher plays an extremely important role in achieving the desired surface finish.

## Judging surface finish

Two things are important when judging the surface of the mould. The surface must first have a geometrically correct shape without any long macro waves. This macro shape is mostly an inheritance from earlier grinding and stoning steps.

Secondly, the mirror finish of the mould surface must be free from scratches, pores, orange peel, pitting (pin-holes) etc. The surface finish is normally judged by the naked eye. There are certain difficulties involved in such a visual evaluation. A "flat" surface can look perfect despite the fact that it is not geometrically completely flat. Thus, the eye can be "fooled".

In more sophisticated cases, the finish can be judged by instrumental methods, such as optical interference techniques.

## Factors which affect polishability

The surface smoothness which can be achieved by polishing steel depends on factors such as:

- **Tool steel quality**
- **Heat treatment**
- **Polishing technique.**

In general, it can be stated that polishing technique is the most important factor. If a suitable polishing technique is used it is almost always possible to achieve acceptable results, providing a correctly heat treated, good quality tool steel is used. *If however, an unsuitable technique is used, even the best steels can be ruined.*

### THE TOOL STEEL QUALITY

Particles or areas in the steel surface which deviate from the matrix in terms of hardness and other properties can cause problems during polishing. Slag inclusions of various types and porosities are examples of such undesirable constituents. To improve the polishing properties, Uddeholm uses vacuum degassing, electro-slag refining (ESR)

and vacuum arc remelting (VAR) techniques in the production of its mould steel grades.

**Vacuum degassing** reduces the risk of large slag inclusions and hydrogen embrittlement and also produces a more homogeneous material.

**ESR/VAR treatment** greatly improves properties from the viewpoint of polishability, even better than those achieved by vacuum degassing. ESR/VAR treatment reduces the amount of slag inclusions in the steel and ensures that the remaining slag inclusions which cannot be avoided will be small and evenly distributed throughout the matrix, as shown in figure 1.

Uddeholm Stavax ESR, Uddeholm Mirrax ESR and Uddeholm Polmax stainless mould steels, produced by the ESR and/or the VAR technique, have proved particularly suitable for moulds with the highest surface finish requirements, e.g. optical lenses.

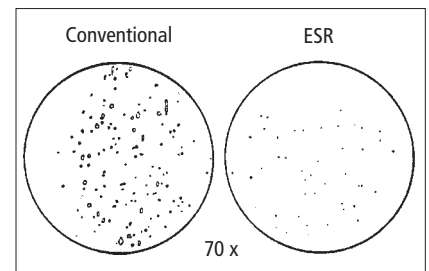


Figure 1. A typical inclusion picture in conventional and ESR-material. (An "inclusion picture" is made up from 70 superimposed photographs at high magnification.)



Lens mould with extreme demand on polishability. The material choice was Uddeholm Stavax ESR.

**HEAT TREATMENT**

Heat treatment can affect polishability in many ways. A case-hardening steel which has been overcarburized is likely to have an unsuitable structure for polishing. This is caused by the creation of small oxide particles under the steel surface, leading to polishing problems. Decarburization or recarburization of the surface during heat treatment can produce variations in hardness, resulting in polishing difficulties.

**POLISHING TECHNIQUE**

**Different steel grades effect on polishing techniques**

Most Uddeholm mould steels, when used at the same hardness levels, take similar polishing times when using standard polishing techniques. Exceptions to this are Uddeholm Stavax ESR, Uddeholm Mirrax ESR and Uddeholm Polmax stainless mould steels. These grades are capable of producing the very best surface quality, but many mouldmakers use a slightly different polishing technique to achieve it. The important thing is to grind to as fine a surface finish as possible before starting the polishing operation. Great importance is placed on stopping the polishing operation **immediately** the last scratch from the former grain size has been removed.

**Different hardnesses effect on polishing technique**

Higher hardness levels make the mould steel more difficult to grind but give higher surface smoothness after polishing. However, harder mould steels require a slightly longer polishing time to achieve higher surface finishes. With higher hardness levels, over-polishing is less likely to be a problem.

**Grinding and stoning of moulds**

**PRACTICAL HINTS**

Normally, a mould cavity is produced by means of milling, EDM'ing or hobbing. If a very smooth surface is desired, the following sequences should be followed:

*After milling:* rough grinding, fine grinding and polishing.

*After EDM'ing:* fine grinding and polishing.

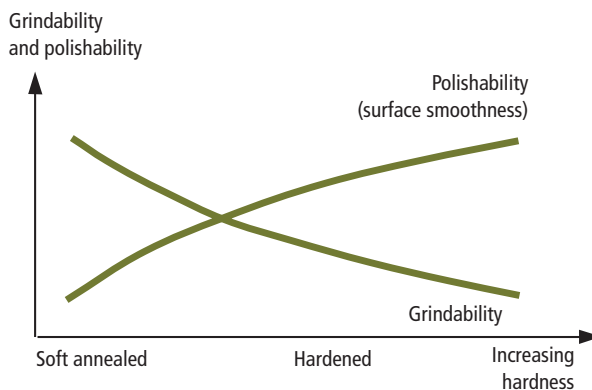
*After hobbing:* a single polishing operation after heat treatment.

It should be emphasized that the grinding operation forms the basis for a rapid and successful polishing job. In grinding, the marks left by the rough-machining operation are removed and a metallurgically pure and geometrically correct surface is obtained. Certain rules should be followed to facilitate the work and ensure good results. This applies to both mechanical grinding and manual stoning.

- The grinding operation must not generate so much heat and pressure that the structure and hardness of the material are affected. Use plenty of coolant.
- Use only clean and free-cutting grinding tools with soft stones for hard surfaces.
- Between each change of grain size, the workpiece and hands should be cleaned to prevent coarse abrasive particles and dust being carried over to the next stage with a finer grain size.

- The finer the grain size used, the more important is the cleaning operation between each change of grain size.
- When changing to next next-finer grain size, grind in a direction at about 45° to the previous grinding direction until the surface only shows scratches from the present grinding step. After scratches from the previous step have disappeared continue for about 25% longer time before changing to the next grain size (except for Uddeholm Stavax ESR, Uddeholm Mirrax ESR and Uddeholm Polmax). This is to remove the "deformed" surface layer caused by mechanical stresses induced during previous grinding operations.
- Changing grinding direction is also important to avoid the formation of irregularities and relief patterns.
- When grinding large, flat mould surfaces, avoid hand-operated grinding discs. The use of a stone reduces the risk of obtaining large shape irregularities.

*Figure 2. The relationship between increasing hardness levels, grindability and polishability*



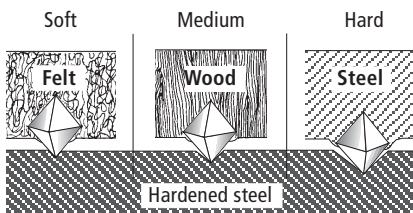
## Polishing of moulds

### PRACTICAL HINTS

Diamond paste is the most common abrasive agent used in polishing.

Optimum performance is obtained with the right paste, on the right polishing tool. The most common polishing tools are sticks, pads and blocks for manual use and bobs, brushes and discs for machines.

Polishing tools are available in materials of different hardnesses from metals through different types of fibre (e.g. wood, synthetic fibre) to soft felt. The hardness of the polishing tool affects the exposure of the diamond grains and the removal rate. The following figure illustrates this:



Time-consuming and expensive polishing can be cut by observing certain rules.

**Above all, cleanliness in every step of the polishing operation is of such great importance that it cannot be overemphasized.**

- Polishing should be carried out in dust- and draughtfree places. Hard dust particles can easily contaminate the abrasive and ruin an almost finished surface.
- Each polishing tool should be used for **only one** paste grade and kept in dust-proof containers.
- The polishing tools gradually become "impregnated" and improve with use.

- Hands and workpiece should be cleaned carefully between each change of paste grade, the workpiece with a grease solvent and the hands with soap.
- Paste should be applied to the polishing tool in manual polishing, while in machine polishing, the paste should be applied to the workpiece.
- Polishing pressure should be adjusted to the hardness of the polishing tool and the grade of the paste. For the finest grain sizes, the pressure should only be the weight of the polishing tool.
- Heavy material removal requires hard polishing tools and coarse paste.
- Finish polishing of plastic moulds should be carried out in the release directional.
- Polishing should start in the corners, edges and fillets or other difficult parts of the mould.
- Be careful with sharp corners and edges, so they are not rounded off. Preferably use hard polishing tools.



*Polishing a plastic mould.*

# Typical polishing sequences

The choice of grinding and polishing sequences is determined by the experience of the operator and the equipment he has at his disposal. The properties of the material can also affect the sequence.

In polishing there are two methods used. In the first method, a paste with a certain grain size is selected and a hard polishing tool is used initially, after which softer and softer polishing tools are used. In the second method, a medium-hard polishing tool is selected

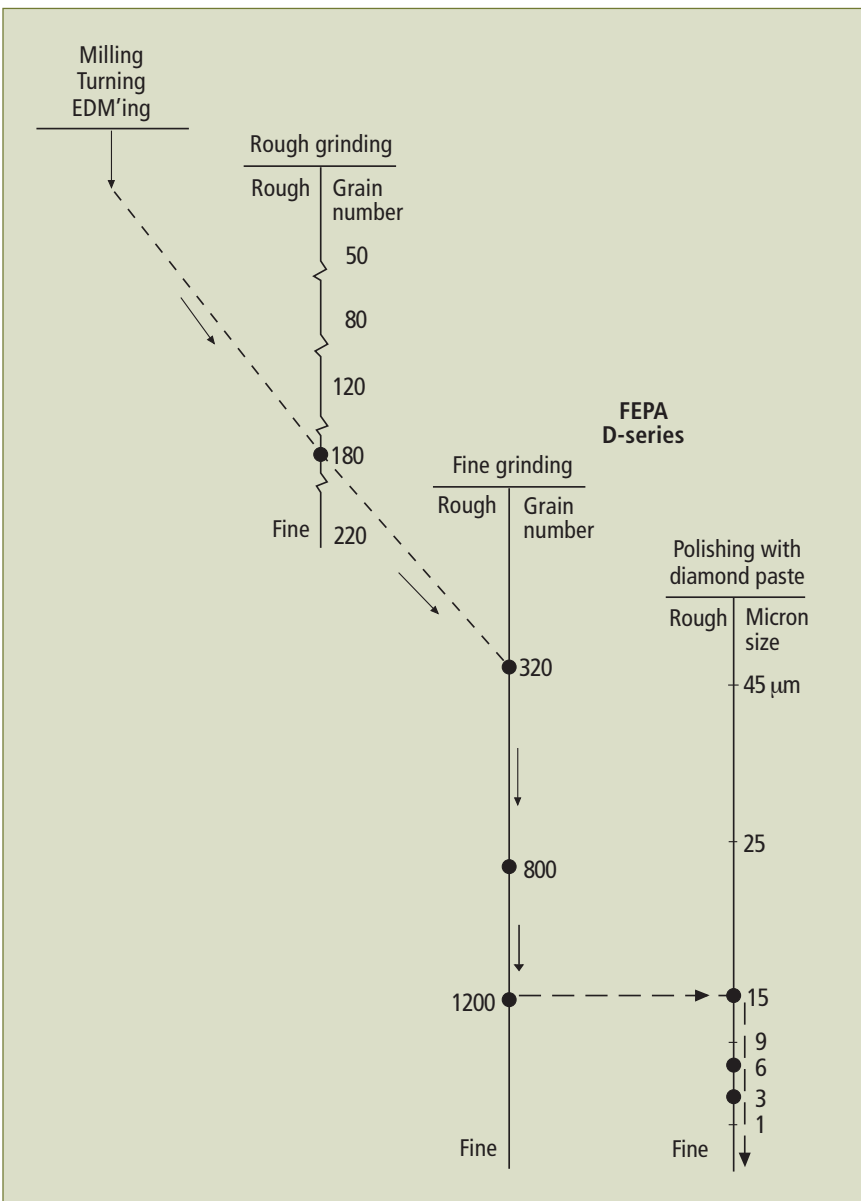
and coarse paste is used initially. Then the grain size of the paste is gradually reduced towards finer and finer pastes. A combination of these two methods can be recommended.

*Example of sequences:*

- Start with a hard polishing tool and a coarse paste.
- Then change to a softer polishing tool with the same paste.
- Then use a medium-hard polishing tool and a medium-coarse paste.
- Change to a soft polishing tool with the same paste.
- Finally, use a soft polishing tool and a fine paste.

Examples of how to combine polishing tool and grain size of the abrasive.

Cloth Hardness	Cloth material	Abrasive Micron
Very hard	Steel Nylon reinforced	Diamond 45, 15, 6, 3
Hard	Coated nylon	Diamond 9, 6, 3
Hard	Silk	Diamond 15, 6, 3, 1 Alumina
Hard	Paper	Diamond 15, 6, 3 Alumina
Soft	Wool	Diamond 6, 3, 1
Soft	Dense nylon velvet	Diamond 3
Very soft	Velvet	Diamond 1 and smaller Alumina MgO OP-5



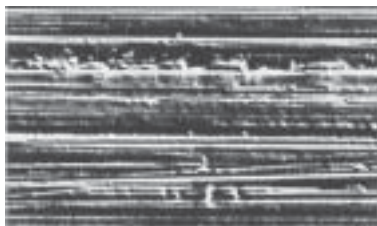
This diagram shows example of how the polishing sequence can be selected.



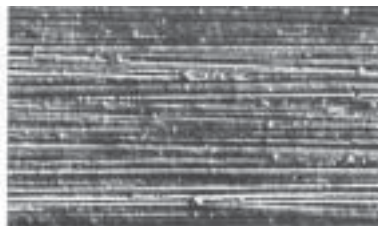
Grain size conversion table

Grain sizes $\mu\text{m}$	Commercial grain number	FEPA grain number				
5100–4000	4					
4000–3500	5					
3500–2830	6					
2830–2380	8	8				
2380–2000	10	10				
2000–1680	12	12				
1680–1410	14	14				
1410–1190	16	16				
1190–1000	20	20				
1000– 840		(22)				
840– 710	24	24				
710– 590	30	30				
590– 500	36	36				
500– 420	40	(40)				
420– 350	46	46				
350– 297	50	50				
297– 250	60	60				
250– 210	70	70				
210– 177	80	80				
177– 149	90	90				
149– 125	100	100				
125– 105	120	120				
105– 88	150	150				
88– 74	180	180				
74– 62	200	200				
62– 53	220	220				
		F-series			D-series	
		No.	$\mu\text{m}$		No.	$\mu\text{m}$
		230	$56,0 \pm 3$			
53– 45	240	240	$49,3 \pm 2$	240	240	$58,5 \pm 2$
45– 37	280	280	$41,5 \pm 1,5$		280	$52,2 \pm 2$
37– 31	320	320	$34,4 \pm 1,5$		320	$46,2 \pm 1,5$
		360	$28,2 \pm 1,5$		360	$40,5 \pm 1,5$
31– 27	400	400	$23,0 \pm 1,0$		400	$35,0 \pm 1,5$
27– 22	500	500	$18,2 \pm 1,0$		500	$30,2 \pm 1,5$
22– 18	600	600	$14,3 \pm 1,0$		600	$25,75 \pm 1,0$
18– 15	700					
15– 11	800	800	$10,6 \pm 1,0$		800	$21,8 \pm 1,0$
11– 8	1000	1000	$7,8 \pm 0,8$		1000	$18,3 \pm 1,0$
		1200	$5,6 \pm 0,5$		1200	$15,2 \pm 1,0$
8– 5	2000				2400	10
5– 0	3000				4000	5

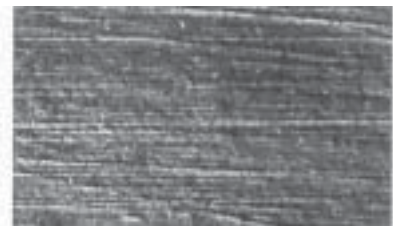
Surface roughness after grinding. Magnification x 300



Grain size 90–75  $\mu\text{m}$   
Arithmetic Average micro inch 8



27–24  $\mu\text{m}$   
2,8



16–14  $\mu\text{m}$   
1,2

Surface roughness after using diamond paste on nylon cloth. Magnification x 300



Grain size 30  $\mu\text{m}$   
Arithmetic Average micro inch 2,4



7  $\mu\text{m}$   
0,4



1  $\mu\text{m}$   
0,24

## Different surface conditions prior to polishing

EDM'd surfaces are more difficult to grind than conventionally machined or heat treated surfaces. An EDM-operation should be finished with a fine sparking stage. If the fine sparking stage is performed correctly, there will be no problems. If not, a thin rehardened layer will remain on the surface. This layer is considerably harder than the matrix and must be removed.

A nitrided or case hardened surface is more difficult to grind than base material but takes a good surface finish after polishing. However, small defects produced in the surface layer do not always allow the extremely high surface finishes to be obtained.

A mould that has been flame-hardened or repair welded often shows a soft zone between the treated part and the base material. To avoid a ditch formation along the soft zone use a broad stone.

## Surface roughness after different heat treatment methods

Many toolmakers ask the question: "How far should I go in grinding steps before heat treatment?"

It should be borne in mind that during heat treatment some dimensional changes are likely to take place, possibly requiring a final finishing operation. Furthermore, the surface finish of the mould may be affected by the heat treatment medium. There is no point, therefore, in polishing a mould to a very high finish before heat treatment if size/shape changes and/or surface deterioration make further finishing operations necessary.

## Polishing problems can be solved

The predominant problem in polishing is so-called "overpolishing". Overpolishing is the term used when a polished surface gets worse the longer you polish it. There are basically two phenomena which appear when a surface is overpolished: "Orange peel" and "Pitting" (pin holes). It should be pointed out that overpolishing often occurs in connection with machine polishing.

### "ORANGE PEEL"

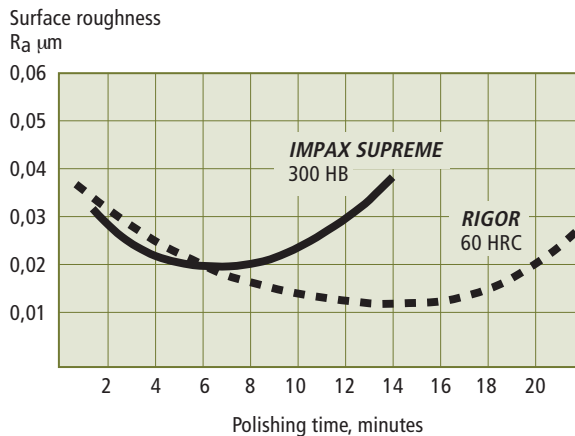
The appearance of an irregular, rough surface, which is normally referred to as "orange peel", may depend on a number of different causes. The most common is overheating or overcarburation from heat treatment in combination with high pressure and prolonged polishing. A harder material can better withstand a high polishing pressure, softer steels overpolish more easily. Studies have shown that the overpolishing effect occurs at different polishing times for different hardnesses.

Either of the following alternatives can be adopted to restore the surface.

- Alt 1** Remove the defective surface layer by grinding the surface using the next-to-last grinding step prior to polishing. Start again at the final grinding stage. Use a lower pressure during polishing than before.
- Alt 2** Stress-relieve at a temperature about 25°C (45°F) below the last tempering temperature. Regrind using the final grinding step prior to polishing until a satisfactory surface has been obtained. Start polishing again, but at a lower polishing pressure than before.

If the result is still not good, the hardness must be raised. This can be done in a number of different ways:

- Increase the surface hardness of the steel by means of nitriding or nitro-carburizing treatment.
- Heat treat the tool to a higher hardness.



The normal reaction of a person who sees that a surface has deteriorated is to increase the polishing pressure and continue polishing. Such a course of action will inevitably result in further surface deterioration.



### “PITTING”

The very small pits which can occur in a polished surface generally result from slag (non-metallic) inclusions in the form of hard, brittle oxides which have been torn out from the surface by the polishing process. The causal factors which are of importance in this connection are:

- **Polishing time and pressure.**
- **Purity of the steel**, especially with regard to hard slag inclusions.
- **The polishing tool.**
- **The abrasive.**

One of the reasons why pitting can occur is the difference in hardness between the matrix and the slag inclusion. During polishing, the matrix will be removed at a more rapid rate than the hard slag particles. Polishing will gradually “undermine” the slag particle until the particle is torn out of the material by further polishing. This leaves a pit. The problem is most often encountered in the case of paste grain size less than 10  $\mu\text{m}$  and soft polishing tools (e.g. felt).

One way to minimise the risk of pitting is to select high-purity mould steels that have been subjected to vacuum-degassing, electro-slag refining (ESR) or vacuum arc remelting (VAR) during manufacture.

If pitting still occurs the following measures should be taken:

- Regrind the surface carefully using the next-to-last grinding step prior to polishing. Use a soft free-cutting stone. Then start with the final grinding step and then polish.
- When using grain sizes 10  $\mu\text{m}$  and smaller, the softest polishing tools should be avoided.
- Polish for the shortest possible time and under lowest possible pressure.



## Europe

### Austria

Representative office

UDDEHOLM  
Albstraße 10  
DE-73765 Neuhausen  
Telephone: +49 7158 9865-0  
www.uddeholm.de

### Belgium

UDDEHOLM  
Europark Oost 7  
B-9100 Sint-Niklaas  
Telephone: +32 3 780 56 20  
www.uddeholm.be

### Croatia

BÖHLER UDDEHOLM Zagreb  
d.o.o za trgovinu  
Zitnjak b.b  
10000 Zagreb  
Telephone: +385 1 2459 301  
Telefax: +385 1 2406 790  
www.bohler-uddeholm.hr

### Czech Republic

BÖHLER UDDEHOLM CZ s.r.o.  
Division Uddeholm  
U Silnice 949  
161 00 Praha 6, Ruzyně  
Telephone: +420 233 029 850,8  
www.uddeholm.cz

### Denmark

UDDEHOLM A/S  
Kokmose 8, Bramdrupdam  
DK-6000 Kolding  
Telephone: +45 75 51 70 66  
www.uddeholm.dk

### Estonia

UDDEHOLM TOOLING AB  
Silikatsiidi 7  
EE-11216 Tallinn  
Telephone: +372 655 9180  
www.uddeholm.ee

### Finland

OY UDDEHOLM AB  
Ritakuja 1, PL 57  
FI-01741 VANTAA  
Telephone: +358 9 290 490  
www.uddeholm.fi

### France

Head office  
UDDEHOLM  
Z.I. de Mitry-Compans, 12 rue Mercier,  
FR-77297 Mitry Mory Cedex  
Telephone: +33 (0)1 60 93 80 10  
www.uddeholm.fr

Branch offices

UDDEHOLM S.A.  
77bis, rue de Vesoul  
La Nef aux Métiers  
FR-25000 Besançon  
Telephone: +33 (0)381 53 12 19

LE POINT ACIERS  
UDDEHOLM - Aciers à outils  
Z.I. du Recou, Avenue de Champlevert  
FR-69520 GRIGNY  
Telephone: +33 (0)4 72 49 95 61

LE POINT ACIERS  
UDDEHOLM - Aciers à outils  
Z.I. Nord 27, rue François Rochema  
FR-01100 OYONNAX  
Telephone: +33 (0)4 74 73 48 66

### Germany

Head office  
UDDEHOLM  
Hansaallee 321  
DE-40549 Düsseldorf  
Telephone: +49 211 5351-0  
www.uddeholm.de

Branch offices

UDDEHOLM  
Falkenstrasse 21  
DE-65812 Bad Soden/TS  
Telephone: +49 6196 6596-0

UDDEHOLM  
Albstraße 10  
DE-73765 Neuhausen  
Telephone: +49 7158 9865-0

UDDEHOLM  
Friederikenstraße 14b  
DE-06493 Harzgerode  
Telephone: +49 39484 727 267

### Great Britain

UDDEHOLM DIVISION  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM (UK) LIMITED  
European Business Park  
Taylors Lane, Oldbury  
GB-West Midlands B69 2BN  
Telephone: +44 121 552 5511  
Telefax: +44 121 544 2911  
www.uddeholm.co.uk

### Greece

STASSINOPOULOS-UDDEHOLM  
STEEL TRADING S.A.  
20, Athinon Street  
GR-Piraeus 18540  
Telephone: +30 210 4172 109  
www.uddeholm.gr

SKLERO S.A.  
Heat Treatment and Trading of Steel  
Uddeholm Tool Steels  
Industrial Area of Thessaloniki  
P.O. Box 1123  
GR-57022 Sindos, Thessaloniki  
Telephone: +30 2310 79 76 46  
www.sklero.gr

### Hungary

UDDEHOLM TOOLING/BOK  
Dunaharaszti, Jedlik Ányos út 25  
HU-2331 Dunaharaszti 1. Pf. 110  
Telephone/fax: +36 24 492 690  
www.uddeholm.hu

### Ireland

Head office:  
UDDEHOLM DIVISION  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM (UK) LIMITED  
European Business Park  
Taylors Lane, Oldbury  
UK-West Midlands B69 2BN  
Telephone: +44 121 552 5511  
Telefax: +44 121 544 2911  
www.uddeholm.co.uk  
Dublin:  
Telephone: +353 1845 1401

### Italy

UDDEHOLM  
Divisione della Bohler Uddeholm  
Italia S.p.A.  
Via Palizzi, 90  
IT-20157 Milano  
Telephone: +39 02 39 49 211  
www.uddeholm.it

### Latvia

UDDEHOLM TOOLING LATVIA SIA  
Piedrujas Street 7  
LV-1035 Riga  
Telephone: +371 7 702133  
latvia@assab.com

### Lithuania

UDDEHOLM TOOLING AB  
BE PLIENAS IR METALAI  
T. Masiulio 18B  
LT-52459 Kaunas  
Telephone: +370 37 370613, -669  
www.besteel.lt

### The Netherlands

UDDEHOLM  
Isolatorweg 30  
NL-1014 AS Amsterdam  
Telephone: +31 20 581 71 11  
www.uddeholm.nl

### Norway

UDDEHOLM A/S  
Jernkroken 18  
Postboks 85, Kalbakken  
NO-0902 Oslo  
Telephone: +47 22 91 80 00  
www.uddeholm.no

### Poland

BOHLER UDDEHOLM POLSKA  
Sp. z o.o./Co. Ltd.  
ul. Kolejowa 291, Dziekanów Polski,  
PL-05-092 Lomianki  
Telephone: +48 22 429 2260, -203, -204  
www.uddeholm.pl

### Portugal

F RAMADA Aços e Industrias S.A.  
P.O. Box 10  
PT-3881 Ovar Codex  
Telephone: +351 256 580580  
www.ramada.pt

### Romania

BÖHLER-UDDEHOLM Romania SRL  
Atomistilor Str. No 96-102  
077125 - com. Magurele, Jud. Ilfov.  
Telephone: +40 214 575007  
Telefax: +40 214 574212

### Russia

UDDEHOLM TOOLING CIS  
9A, Lipovaya Alleya, Office 509  
RU-197183 Saint Petersburg  
Telephone: +7 812 6006194  
www.uddeholm.ru

### Slovakia

Bohler-Uddeholm Slovakia s.r.o.  
divizia UDDEHOLM  
Čsl.Armády 5622/5  
SK-036 01 Martin  
Telephone: +421 (0)434 212 030  
www.uddeholm.sk

### Slovenia

Representative office  
UDDEHOLM  
Divisione della Bohler Uddeholm  
Italia S.p.A.  
Via Palizzi, 90  
IT-20157 Milano  
Telephone: +39 02 39 49 211  
www.uddeholm.it

### Spain

Head office  
UDDEHOLM  
Guiñfó 690-692  
ES-08918 Badalona, Barcelona  
Telephone: +34 93 460 1227  
www.acerosuddeholm.com

Branch office

UDDEHOLM  
Barrio San Martín de Arteaga,132  
Pol.Ind. Torrelarragoiti  
ES-48170 Zamudio (Bizkaia)  
Telephone: +34 94 452 13 03

### Sweden

Head office  
UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Aminogatan 25  
SE-431 53 Mölndal  
Telephone: +46 31 67 98 50  
www.uddeholm.se

Branch offices

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Box 45  
SE-334 21 Anderstorp  
Telephone: +46 371 160 15

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Box 148  
SE-631 03 Eskilstuna  
Telephone: +46 16 15 79 00

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Aminogatan 25  
SE-431 53 Mölndal  
Telephone: +46 31 67 98 70

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Nya Tanneforsvägen 96  
SE-582 42 Linköping  
Telephone: +46 13 15 19 90

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Derbyvägen 22  
SE-212 35 Malmö  
Telephone: +46 40 22 32 05

UDDEHOLM TOOLING SVENSKA AB  
Honnörsgratan 24  
SE-352 36 Växjö  
Telephone: +46 470 457 90

### Switzerland

HERTSCH & CIE AG  
General Wille Strasse 19  
CH-8027 Zürich  
Telephone: +41 44 208 16 66  
www.hertsch.ch

### Turkey

Head office  
ASSAB Korkmaz Celik A.S.  
Organize Sanayi Bölgesi  
2. Cadde No: 26 Y. Dudullu  
34776 Umraniye  
TR-Istanbul  
Telephone: +90 216 420 1926  
www.assabkorkmaz.com

## America

### Argentina

ACEROS BOEHLER UDDEHOLM S.A  
Mozart 40  
1619-Centro Industrial Garin  
Garin-Prov.  
AR-Buenos Aires  
Telephone: +54 332 7444 440  
www.uddeholm.com.ar

### Brazil

AÇOS BOHLER-UDDEHOLM DO  
BRASIL LTDA- DIV. UDDEHOLM  
Estrada Yae Massumoto, 353  
CEP 09842-160  
BR-Sao Bernardo do Campo - SP Brazil  
Telephone: +55 11 4393 4560, 4554  
www.uddeholm.com.br

### Canada

*Head Office & Warehouse*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM LIMITED  
2595 Meadowvale Blvd.  
Mississauga, ON L5N 7Y3  
Telephone: +1 905 812 9440  
www.bucanada.com

*Branch Warehouses*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM LIMITED  
3521 Rue Ashby  
St. Laurent, QC H4R 2K3  
Telephone: +1 514 333 8000

BOHLER-UDDEHOLM LIMITED  
730 Eaton Way - Unit #10  
New Westminster, BC V3M 6J9  
Telephone: +1 604 525 3354

*Heat Treating*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM  
THERMO-TECH  
2645 Meadowvale Blvd.  
Mississauga, ON L5N 7Y4  
Telephone: +1 905 812 9440

### Colombia

AXXECOL S.A.  
Carrera 35 No 13-20  
Apartado Aereo 80718  
CO-Bogota 6  
Telephone: +57 1 2010700  
www.axxecol.com

ASTEKO S.A.  
Carrera 54 No 35-12  
Apartado Aereo 663  
CO-Medellin  
Telephone: +57 4 2320122  
www.asteco.com

### Dominican Republic

RAMCA, C. POR A.  
P-2289  
P.O. Box 025650  
Miami, Fl. 33102  
Telephone: +1 809 682 4011  
domrep@assab.com

### Ecuador

IVAN BOHMAN C.A.  
Apartado 1317  
Km 6 1/2 Via a Daule  
Guayaquil  
Telephone: +593 42 254111  
www.ivanbohman.com.ec

IVAN BOHMAN C.A.  
Casilla Postal 17-01370  
Quito  
Telephone: +593 2 2248001  
www.ivanbohman.com.ec

### El Salvador

ACAVIDA DE C.V.  
25 Ave. Sur, no 763  
Zona 1  
SV-San Salvador  
Telephone: +503 22 71 1700  
www.acavisa.com

### Guatemala

IMPORTADORA ESCANDINAVA  
Apartado postal 11C  
GT-Guatemala City  
Telephone: +502 23 659270  
guatemala@assab.com

### Honduras

ACAVIDA DE C.V.  
25 Ave. Sur, no 763  
Zona 1  
SV-San Salvador  
Telephone: +503 22 71 1700  
www.acavisa.com

### Mexico

*Head office*  
ACEROS BOHLER UDDEHOLM S.A.  
de C.V.  
Calle Ocho No 2, Letra "C"  
Fraccionamiento Industrial Alce Blanco  
C.P. 52787 Naucalpan de Juarez  
MX-Estado de Mexico  
Telephone: +52 55 9172 0242  
www.bu-mexico.com

*Branch office*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM MONTERREY,  
NUEVO LEON  
Lerdo de Tejada No.542  
Colonia Las Villas  
MX-66420 San Nicolas de Los Garza,  
N.L.  
Telephone: +52 81 83 525239

### Peru

C.I.P.E.S.A.  
Av. Oscar R. Benavides  
(ante Colonial) No. 2066  
PE-Lima 1  
Telephone: +51 1 336 8673  
peru@assab.com

### U.S.A.

*Head office and Warehouse*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM  
CORPORATION  
2505 Millennium Drive  
Elgin IL 60124  
Telephone: 1-630-883-3000 or  
1-800-652-2520  
Sales phone: 1-800-638-2520  
www.bucorp.com

*Region East Warehouse*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM  
CORPORATION  
548 Clayton Ct.  
Wood Dale IL 60191

*Region Central Warehouse*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM  
CORPORATION  
548 Clayton Ct.  
Wood Dale IL 60191

*Region West Warehouse*  
BOHLER-UDDEHOLM  
CORPORATION  
9331 Santa Fe Springs Road  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670

### Venezuela

PRODUCTOS HUMAR C.A.  
Av. Bolivar, Zona Industrial  
La Trinidad  
Edificio. Distribuidora Agrofor, C.A.  
Piso 3, VE-Caracas 1080  
Telephone: +58 212 942 1994 or  
+58 212 915 7073  
humar@assab.com

### Other Countries in America

ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB  
Box 42  
SE-171 11 Solna, Sweden  
Telephone: +46 8 564 616 70  
www.assab.se

## Asia & Pacific

### Australia

BOHLER UDDEHOLM Australia  
129-135 McCreddie Road  
Guildford NSW 2161  
Private Bag 14  
AU-Sydney  
Telephone: +61 2 9681 3100  
www.buau.com.au

### Bangladesh

ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB  
P.O. Box 17595  
Jebel Ali  
AE-Dubai  
Telephone: +971 488 12165  
www.assab.se

### North China

*Head office*  
ASSAB Tooling (Beijing) Co Ltd  
No.10A Rong Jing Dong Jie  
Beijing Economic Development Area  
Beijing 100176, China  
Telephone: +86 10 6786 5588  
www.assabsteels.com

*Branch offices*  
ASSAB Tooling (Beijing) Ltd  
Dalian Branch  
8 Huanghai Street, Haerbin Road  
Economic & Technical Develop. District  
Dalian 116600, China  
Telephone: +86 411 8761 8080

ASSAB Qingdao Office  
Room 2521, Kexin Mansion  
No. 228 Liaoning Road, Shibei District  
Qingdao 266012, China  
Telephone: +86 532 8382 0930

ASSAB Tianjin Office  
No.12 Puwangli Wanda Xincheng  
Xinyibai Road, Beichen District  
Tianjin 300402, China  
Telephone: +86 22 2672 0006

### Central China

*Head office*  
ASSAB Tooling Technology  
(Shanghai) Co Ltd  
No. 4088 Humin Road  
Xinzhuang Industrial Zone  
Shanghai 201108, China  
Telephone: +86 21 5442 2345  
www.assabsteels.com

*Branch offices*  
ASSAB Tooling Technology  
(Ningbo) Co Ltd  
No. 218 Longjiaoshan Road  
Vehicle Part Industrial Park  
Ningbo Economic & Technical Dev.  
Zone  
Ningbo 315806, China  
Telephone: +86 574 8680 7188

ASSAB Tooling Technology  
(Chongqing) Co Ltd  
Plant C, Automotive Industrial IPark  
Chongqing Economic & Technological  
Development Zone  
Chongqing 401120, China  
Telephone: +86 23 6745 5698

### South China

*Head office*  
ASSAB Steels (HK) Ltd  
Room 1701-1706  
Tower 2 Grand Central Plaza  
138 Shatin Rural Committee Road  
Shatin NT - Hong Kong  
Telephone: +852 2487 1991  
www.assabsteels.com

*Branch offices*  
ASSAB Tooling (Dongguan) Co Ltd  
Northern District  
Song Shan Lake Science & Technology  
Industrial Park  
Dongguan 523808, China  
Telephone: +86 769 2289 7888  
www.assabsteels.com

ASSAB Tooling (Xiamen) Co Ltd  
First Floor Universal Workshop  
No. 30 Huli Zone  
Xiamen 361006, China  
Telephone: +86 592 562 4678

### Hong Kong

ASSAB Steels (HK) Ltd  
Room 1701-1706  
Grand Central Plaza, Tower 2  
138 Shatin Rural Committee Road  
Shatin NT, Hong Kong  
Telephone: +852 2487 1991  
www.assabsteels.com

### India

ASSAB Sripad Steels LTD  
T 303 D.A.V. Complex  
Mayur Vihar Ph I Extension  
IN-Delhi-110 091  
Telephone: +91 11 2271 2736  
www.assabsripad.com

ASSAB Sripad Steels LTD  
709, Swastik Chambers  
Sion-Trombay Road  
Chembur  
IN-Mumbai-400 071  
Telephone: +91 22 2522-7110, -8133  
www.assabsripad.com

ASSAB Sripad Steels LTD  
Padmalaya Towers  
Janaki Avenue  
M.R.C. Nagar  
IN-Chennai-600 028  
Telephone: +91 44 2495 2371  
www.assabsripad.com

ASSAB Sripad Steels LTD  
19X, D. P. P. Road  
Naktola Post Office  
IN-Kolkata-700 047  
Telephone: +91 (33) 400 1645  
www.assabsripad.com

ASSAB Sripad Steels LTD  
Ground floor, Plot No 11-6-8  
Opp IDPL Factory Out Gate  
Balanagar  
IN-Hyderabad-500 037  
Telephone: +91 (40) 2377 8148  
www.assabsripad.com

### Indonesia

*Head office*  
PT ASSAB Steels Indonesia  
Jl. Rawagelam III No. 5  
Kawasan Industri Puloagung  
Jakarta 13930, Indonesia  
Telephone: +62 21 461 1314  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Branch offices

**SURABAYA BRANCH**  
Jl. Berbek Industri 1/23  
Surabaya Industrial Estate, Rungkut  
Surabaya 60293, East Java, Indonesia  
Telephone: +62 31 843 2277

**MEDAN BRANCH**  
Komplek Griya Riatour Indah  
Blok A No.138  
Jl. T. Amir Hamzah  
Halvetia Timur, Medan 20124  
Telephone: +62 61 847 7935/6

**BANDUNG BRANCH**  
Komp. Ruko Bumi Kencana  
Jl. Titian Kencana Blok E  
No.5 Bandung 40233  
Telephone: +62 22 604 1364

**TANGERANG BRANCH**  
Pusat Niaga Cibodas  
Blok C No. 7 Tangerang  
Telephone: +62 21 921 9596, 551 2732

**SEMARANG BRANCH**  
Jl. Imam Bonjol No.155  
R.208 Semarang 50124  
Telephone: +62 358 8167

#### Iran

**ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB**  
P.O. Box 19395  
IR-1517 TEHRAN  
Telephone: +98 21 888 35392  
www.assabiran.com

#### Israel

**PACKER YADPAZ QUALITY STEELS Ltd**  
P.O. Box 686  
Ha-Yarkon St. 7, Industrial Zone  
IL-81106 YAVNE  
Telephone: +972 8 932 8182  
www.packer.co.il

#### Japan

**UDDEHOLM KK**  
Atago East Building  
3-16-11 Nishi Shinbashi  
Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0003, Japan  
Telephone: + 81 3 5473 4641  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Jordan

**ENGINEERING WAY Est.**  
P.O. Box 874  
Abu Alanda  
JO-AMMAN 11592  
Telephone: +962 6 4161962  
engineeringway@assab.com

#### Malaysia

*Head office*  
**ASSAB Steels (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd**  
Lot 19, Jalan Perusahaan 2  
Batu Caves Industrial Estate  
68100 Batu Caves  
Selangor Malaysia  
Telephone: +60 3 6189 0022  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Branch offices

**BUTTERWORTH BRANCH**  
Plot 146a  
Jalan Perindustri Bukit Minyak 7  
Kawasan Perindustri Bukit Minyak  
14000 Bukit Mertajam, SPT Penang  
Telephone: +60 4 507 2020

**JOHOR BRANCH**  
No. 8, Jalan Persiaran Teknologi  
Taman Teknologi  
81400 Senai  
Johor DT, Malaysia  
Telephone: +60 7 598 0011

#### New Zealand

**VIKING STEELS**  
25 Beach Road, Otahuhu  
P.O. Box 13-359, Onehunga  
NZ-Auckland  
Telephone: +64 9 270 1199  
www.ssm.co.nz

#### Pakistan

**ASSAB International AB**  
P.O. Box 17595  
Jebel Ali  
AE-Dubai  
Telephone: +971 488 12165  
www.assab.se

#### Philippines

**ASSOCIATED SWEDISH STEELS PHILS Inc.**  
No. 3 E. Rodriguez Jr., Avenue  
Bagong Ilog, Pasig City  
Philippines  
Telephone: +632 671 1953/2048  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Republic of Korea

*Head office*  
**ASSAB Steels (Korea) Co Ltd**  
116B-8L, 687-8, Kojan-dong  
Namdong-ku  
Incheon 405-310, Korea  
Telephone: +82 32 821 4300  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Branch offices

**BUSAN BRANCH**  
14B-5L, 1483-9, Songjeong-dong  
Kangseo-ku, Busan 618-270, Korea  
Telephone: +82 51 831 3315

**DAEGU BRANCH**  
Room 27, 7-Dong2 F  
Industry Materials Bldg.1629  
Sangyeog-Dong, Buk-Ku  
Korea-Daegu 702-710  
Telephone: +82 53 604 5133

#### Lebanon

**WARDE STEEL & METALS SARL MET**  
Charles Helou Av, Warde Bldg  
P.O. Box 165886  
LB-Beirut  
Telephone: +961 1 447228  
lebanon@assab.com

#### Saudi Arabia

**ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB**  
P.O. Box 255092  
SA-Riyadh 11353  
Telephone: +966 1 4466542  
assab@emirates.net.ae

#### Singapore

*Head office Pacific*  
**ASSAB Pacific Pte Ltd**  
171, Chin Swee Road  
No. 07-02, SAN Centre  
SG-Singapore 169877  
Telephone: +65 6534 5600  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Jurong

**ASSAB Steels Singapore (Pte) Ltd**  
18, Penjuru Close  
SG-608616 Singapore  
Telephone: +65 6862 2200

#### Sri Lanka

**GERMANIA COLOMBO PRIVATE Ltd.**  
451/A Kandy Road  
LK-Kelaniya  
Telephone: +94 11 2913556  
www.iwsholdings.com

#### Syria

**WARDE STEEL & METALS SARL MET**  
Charles Helou Av, Warde Bldg  
P.O. Box 165886  
LB-Beirut  
Telephone: +961 1 447228  
lebanon@assab.com

#### Taiwan

*Head office*  
**ASSAB Steels (Taiwan) Co Ltd**  
No. 112 Wu Kung 1st Rd.  
Wu Ku Industry Zone  
TW-Taipei 248-87, Taiwan (R.O.C.)  
Telephone: +886 2 2299 2849  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Branch offices

**NANTOU BRANCH**  
No. 10, Industry South 5th Road  
Nan Kang Industry Zone  
Nantou 540-66, Taiwan (R.O.C.)  
Telephone: +886 49 225 1702  
**TAINAN BRANCH**  
No. 180, Yen He Street,  
Yong Kang City  
Tainan 710-82, Taiwan (R.O.C.)  
Telephone: +886 6 242 6838

#### Thailand

**ASSAB Steels (Thailand) Ltd**  
9/8 Soi Theedintai,  
Taeparak Road, Bangplee,  
Samutprakarn 10540, Thailand  
Telephone: +66 2 385 5937,  
+66 2 757 5017  
www.assabsteels.com

#### United Arab Emirates

**ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB**  
P.O. Box 17595  
Jebel Ali  
AE-Dubai  
Telephone: +971 488 12165  
www.assab.se

#### Vietnam

**CAM Trading Steel Co Ltd**  
90/8 Block 5, Tan Thoi Nhat Ward  
District 12, Ho Chi Minh City  
Vietnam  
Telephone: +84 8 5920 920  
www.assabsteels.com

#### Other Asia

**ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB**  
Box 42  
E-171 11 Solna, Sweden  
Telephone: +46 8 564 616 70  
www.assab.se

## Africa

#### Egypt

**MISR SWEDEN FOR ENGINEERING IND.**  
Montaser Project No 20  
Flat No 14  
Al Ahram Street-El Tabia  
EG-Giza Cairo  
Telephone: +254 20 7797751  
www.assab.se

#### Kenya

**SANDVIK Kenya Ltd**  
P.O. Box 18264  
Post code 00500  
KE-Nairobi  
Telephone: +254 20 532 866  
info@sandvik.co.ke

#### Morocco

**MCM Distribution**  
4 Bis, Rue 8610 - Z.I.  
2035 Charguia 1  
TN-Tunis  
Telephone: + 216 71 802 479

#### South Africa

**UDDEHOLM Africa (Pty.) Ltd.**  
P.O. Box 539  
ZA-1600 Isando/Johannesburg  
Telephone: +27 11 974 2791  
www.bohler-uddeholm.co.za

#### Tunisia

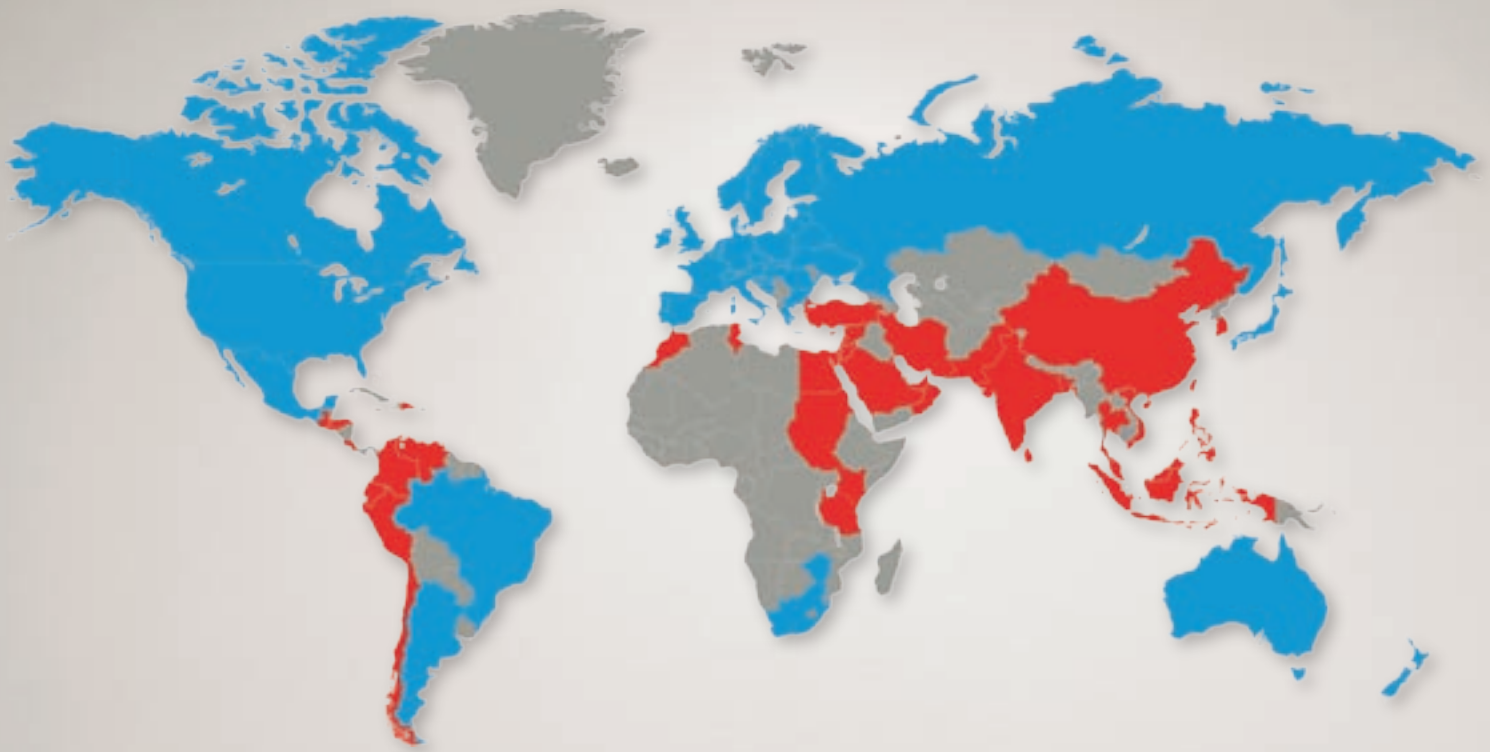
**MCM Distribution**  
4 Bis, Rue 8610 - Z.I.  
2035 Charguia 1  
TN-Tunis  
Telephone: + 216 71 802 479  
www.mcm.com.tn

#### Zimbabwe

*Representative office:*  
**UDDEHOLM Africa (Pty.) Ltd.**  
P.O. Box 539  
ZA-1600 Isando/Johannesburg  
Telephone: +27 11 974 2781  
www.bohler-uddeholm.co.za

#### Other African Countries

**ASSAB INTERNATIONAL AB**  
Box 42  
SE-171 11 Solna, Sweden  
Telephone: +46 8 564 616 70  
www.assab.se



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