

**Brandt, CGE, Saint-Gobain**). Several large industrial groups which are present in the area have decentralised their decision-making power in Rhône-Alpes.

5.3. The tables accompanying this overview effectively demonstrate the strengths of manufacturing activity in the region namely :

- Mechanical Construction
- Electric/Electronic Construct.
- Plastics, composites
- Agri-food
- Metal work
- Automobile
- Textiles, Clothing
- Chemicals

5.4. In Rhône-Alpes is located France's most important **plastics industry** activity, with 918 companies which employ 28,300, representing a third of French processing industry. Known as the French "Plastic Valley", the region of Oyonnax (Ain), is home to 40% of those plants processing plastics and should become the backbone of the plastics industry in Europe. Oyonnax just opened the "**Pôle Européen de la Plasturgie**", a European centre of excellence in plastics higher education.

5.5. In addition, the balance and dynamism of the regional economy is based on the existence of a large structure of **small and medium sized firms** (more than 80% of the 37,000 firms are SMEs) which are increasingly productive. Their ability to adapt technology and innovate represents one of Rhône-Alpes best assets in this period of great economic change.

## 6. RESEARCH IN RHÔNE-ALPES

6.1. With more than 14,200 employees, of which 4,650 are research workers and engineers, Rhône-Alpes occupies the **second place** in French scientific and technical research with 9.8% of jobs and 25% of research facilities in France, excluding the Paris area.