PRODUCTION OF RUBBER

There are two types of rubber – natural and synthetic (chemical) rubber.

Natural Rubber

Natural (raw) rubber can be produced from a variety of trees. The most important and common of the trees is the rubber tree (also called Hevea tree). Rubber tree occurs as latex. Latex is a liquid substance which looks like milk. This latex is found under the bark of the rubber tree. When the tree is tapped, the latex is collected. If the latex is heated, it changes into an elastic soft and sticky solid which is called rubber.

The latex can also be converted into crepe rubber. Crepe rubber is tightly pressed rubber used especially for making the bottoms of shoes. The raw rubber produced can further be improved through a process called *vulcanisation*. Vulcanisation is a special chemical treatment where sulphur is added to raw rubber and heated at a high temperature. Vulcanisation makes rubber harder, more elastic, durable and able to withstand high temperatures.

Synthetic (Chemical) Rubber

Synthetic rubber is artificially made rubber. It is made of chemical substances (raw materials) derived from petroleum, coal, oil, natural gas and acetylene.

The term elastomer is sometimes used for synthetic rubber. Synthetic rubber serves as a substitute for natural rubber in many cases, especially when improved material properties are needed. Hence, today synthetic rubber accounts for about sixty percent of the world's rubber production.