

Roy J. Plunkett Biography

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Biography

Chemist Roy J. Plunkett discovered tetrafluoroethylene resin while researching refrigerants at Du Pont. Better known by its trade name, Teflon, this material was found to be both extremely heat-tolerant and stick-resistant. Following 10 years of investigative research, Du Pont introduced Teflon to the market in 1949. Since then, it has become an important coating for everything from satellite components to electric wires to cookware.

Plunkett was born in New Carlisle, Ohio, and graduated from Manchester College in 1932 with a B.A. in chemistry. He received a master's degree in 1933 and a Ph.D. in 1936, both from the Ohio State University. He was also awarded honorary doctorate degrees from Manchester College, Washington College, and Ohio State.

Plunkett joined du Pont as a research chemist at the Jackson Laboratory in Deepwater, New Jersey in 1936. Less than two years later, he had made his discovery of Teflon tetrafluoroethylene resin--a discovery he himself characterized as accidental. In 1939 he was promoted to chemical supervisor for the manufacture of tetraethyl lead at the largest Du Pont plant of that time. He continued to work in administration there until 1952. Later he directed operations for Du Pont's Freon Products Division. Plunkett retired from Du Pont in 1975, and died in 1994.

Plunkett's management of research, development, and production efforts at Du Pont resulted in the creation of numerous new fluorochemical products and processes that have become widely used in the refrigeration, aerosol, electronic, plastics, and aerospace industries. Many of these are considered to be of critical importance to national defense.