



The 6th International Conference on Life Cycle Management in Gothenburg 2013

## **SUSTAINABILITY ACTIVITIES OF CEFIC**

*Véronique Garny – Director Product Stewardship at Cefic, avenue E. van Nieuwenhuyse 4 –  
1160 Brussels – Email: [vga@cefic.be](mailto:vga@cefic.be)*

*Keywords: chemical industry; trade association; sustainability; Responsible Care®;  
performance*

### **ABSTRACT**

Sustainable development has been identified as a strategic priority of Cefic, the European Chemical Industry Council. Recognising that the chemical industry's products and services can play a key role in enabling a sustainable society, the industry association has initiated a range of activities to communicate about the sector's sustainability commitment and contributions.

In 2012, Cefic presented the 2050 sustainability vision of the European chemical industry and published the sector's first collective sustainability report. As next steps, the vision is being translated into three objectives: sustainable operations, sustainable products for society and attracting and maintaining investments in Europe. These in turn are declined into action through further development of methods and tools, such as sectoral sustainability metrics and practical guidance on sustainability topics, and through industry flagship initiatives, i.e. major projects that bring together several companies and organisations to address sustainability challenges.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The chemical industry is well placed to tackle the challenges of sustainability, given the industry's proven track record in innovation, its deep integration in the supply and value chains, and its global presence. In fact there is virtually no product, service or human activity that does not in some way rely on the contribution of chemistry. Chemicals can also help solve major societal challenges such as water, energy, climate change, health, food.

The European chemical industry operates under a robust legislative framework, with the European Union's REACH chemicals regulation as a centerpiece for product safety. In addition, the sector has put in place voluntary initiatives such as the global chemical industry's Responsible Care® initiative, which has for more than twenty years provided an overarching framework for continuously improving safety, health and environmental performance of products and operations.

Today, emerging regulatory and social trends around sustainability create both pressure and opportunities for chemical companies. Legislative requirements, stakeholder expectations and companies' own business and Responsible Care® strategies are all driving the development of further industry efforts on sustainability.



## The 6th International Conference on Life Cycle Management in Gothenburg 2013

In this context, trade associations have an important role to play. Drawing from the expertise of their members and stakeholders, they can contribute to experience sharing and develop common activities based on best practices. In the chemicals sector these types of activities are being developed both at the national level by chemical associations in different countries and at the European level by Cefic, which represents in total 29,000 companies producing about 20 per cent of the world's chemicals.

### **METHOD**

This paper presents the approach taken by Cefic in developing its sustainability activities, by describing selected initiatives undertaken in 2011-2013 and discussing the process from the perspective of a European industry association.

### **RESULTS**

#### **Sustainability vision**

“The European chemical industry is determined to play a key role in ensuring that by 2050 over 9 billion people live well, within the resources of the planet.

- It will gear all of its activities towards enabling a future where people have access to the necessities of a healthy life, to economic prosperity and to societal progress.
- It will drive a quantum leap in innovation enabled by investments and partnerships.
- It will join forces with all its stakeholders, including governments and civil society.
- It will strive to be sustainable in terms of its operations and a key enabler of a sustainable society through the excellence of its employees and the benefits of its products.
- It will keep attracting investments by way of its strong economic performance.”

#### **Sustainability report**

Cefic's first sustainability report, published in 2012, is one step towards achieving the aspirational sustainability vision. The report reviews the sector's performance against standard Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and offers examples of how the products of chemistry are meeting the needs of society and contributing to sustainable development.

The KPIs selected for the report fall under the three traditional pillars of economic development, social development and environmental protection (3P for Planet, People, Profit). They cover topics such as energy use, emissions, waste, water use, workplace safety, employment, labour productivity, profitability, and investment in research and development.

The selection of KPIs was based on the identification of indicators that are supported by official EU & national statistics such as the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register, E-PRTR. The KPIs demonstrate how the European chemical industry is performing over time, and are also an important tool to help identify opportunities for improvement. Progress will be measured and publicised every two years, with the next report scheduled for 2014.



## The 6th International Conference on Life Cycle Management in Gothenburg 2013

In addition to KPIs, the report provides examples of industry initiatives and case studies on how the products of the chemical industry contribute to three areas of major importance to European society: energy and climate change, food and water, and mobility and housing.

### **Guide on sustainability of products**

Building upon the sustainability report, Cefic has published practical guides addressing specific issues. The guide entitled “Sustainability of products – What it’s all about”, published in June 2012, presents approaches that companies can use to assess and develop their product portfolios to help turn sustainability challenges into business opportunities, e.g. through increased resource efficiency.

Aimed particularly at smaller companies, the guide is written in a way that helps demystify many of the concepts and technical terms used by sustainability experts. Topics covered range from general considerations around product stewardship and life cycle thinking to specific tools and methods, such as LCA and environmental footprint methodologies. A “to do” list gives suggestions for first actions to be taken.

The guide is actively used by Cefic’s national chemical industry federations in several European countries, some of which are also translating it into their national language, to help SMEs especially.

### **Guide on biodiversity and ecosystem services**

The guide “Biodiversity and ecosystem services – What are they all about?” published in January 2013 looks at biodiversity and ecosystem services from the perspective of the chemical industry. The guide is based on a study conducted by Cefic in cooperation with environmental consultancy ARCADIS.

Like all sectors, the chemical industry both has an impact on biodiversity and depends on healthy ecosystems. In most cases, the direct impact of chemicals manufacturing on biodiversity is fairly limited, but can be more important in other phases of the value chain.

The guide encourages companies to assess how their operations impact and depend on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Understanding these links helps manage risks and tackle potential opportunities, for example to improve resource efficiency or develop new products.

On the occasion of the launch of the guide, Cefic also organised a workshop focusing on the latest EU policy developments and business initiatives aimed at protecting and restoring biodiversity.

### **Flagship initiatives**

Cefic has also identified “flagship initiatives”, major industry projects that address societal challenges through cooperation between several companies and organisations.

Current initiatives include:

- Zero Plastics to Landfill by 2020: saving plastics from being buried through recycling and energy recovery;
- VinylPlus: tackling sustainability challenges in the PVC value chain;



## The 6th International Conference on Life Cycle Management in Gothenburg 2013

- Sustainable Process Industry through Resource and Energy Efficiency (SPIRE): boosting innovation in resource and energy efficiency in the process industries in the EU;
- Water management: promoting sustainable use of water in the chemical industry.

These initiatives are intended to be concrete translations of the sector's sustainability vision. Each project has defined its objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), key milestones, existing and potential partners and important external stakeholders. Cefic's role is to provide support for implementation, communication and cooperation with other actors, such as authorities, Trade Unions, NGOs .... Progress will be reported regularly, and new initiatives are encouraged.

### **DISCUSSION**

Trade associations have a role to play in forging common industry initiatives leading to sustainability. Cefic, representing the European chemical industry, has embarked on this process led by its vision to play a key role in the sustainable future of our planet. Driven by a high level commitment, the sector's performance will be monitored through key indicators. Raising commonly agreed perspectives on the sector's major impact is a challenge that Cefic is continuously facing. Cultural, national and individual companies' differences have to be taken into account. On the other hand, working together and agreeing on common guidance brings a lot of experience to a large number of members. Shared good practice and advice have led to the preparation of "to do" lists or tips - short reminders to keep at hand.

Challenges by external partners are also of importance to ensure the industry is operating as an integral part of society. Raising public awareness of the benefits chemicals bring to society is another focus of ours. The consultation process that ran in parallel to the development of the above-mentioned reports and guides stimulated further thinking.

The next sustainability report to be published in 2014 will highlight accomplishments in the area of sustainable operations, sustainable products and how to maintain and attract investments in EU.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Sustainability is key for the chemical industry and Cefic has a part to play in enabling efforts. Its sustainability vision "to play a key role in ensuring that by 2050 over 9 billion people live well, within the resources of the planet" is a key driver for several joint initiatives, either guiding its membership or promoting sectoral performance goals. Cefic is committed to continue reporting on progress on a regular basis.

### **REFERENCES**

Cefic sustainability: <http://www.cefic.org/sustainability/>