



Growing more, consuming less? Chemical innovation is providing some important answers.

Sustainability

How do we become resource efficient without compromising quality of life? Chemical products and chemistry-driven advances in technology are providing some critical answers and ensure the sustainable development of modern societies. This is why it is critical that the industry's voice is heard in Brussels and in other European decision-making forums.

European policymakers by and large acknowledge that the European chemical industry is a world leader in terms of value creation and innovation. Making progress toward sustainability is the bedrock of our business. We provide solutions to global challenges such as greenhouse-gas emissions and climate change, and are making strides in reducing harmful emissions through ever greater process efficiency in energy and feedstock use and by advancing the safe use of chemical substances via REACH, the EU regulation on the Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals.

Responsible Care, the global chemical industry's initiative to drive continuous improvement in its environmental, health and safety performance, was put in place 25 years ago and has been growing ever since, culminating in the Responsible Care Global Charter, addressing the growing public dialogue over sustainable development, public health issues and the need for greater industry transparency.

Chemistry cuts carbon emissions

The effort to curb harmful greenhouse gas emissions worldwide provides the chemical industry with multiple opportunities. Many existing solutions to climate change rely on chemistry to deliver CO₂ savings. Think of insulation materials, low-energy lighting, light-weight materials in transport applications and many other current applications. Chemistry provides the technological backbone to exciting, high-tech developments in nanotechnology, micro- and nano-electronics, photonics, advanced materials and biotechnology.

Life-cycle analysis shows that, in many instances, the carbon emission cuts made possible by chemistry outweigh the emissions required for extraction, manufacture and disposal. For every ton of greenhouse gases emitted directly and indirectly during production, the chemical sector enables more than two tons of emission savings via efficient products and technologies provided to other industries and consumers.

Making further progress, however, requires a business environment conducive to innovation and a supportive regulatory context. There are challenges on both fronts: Europe is not allocating sufficient resources to research and development, and misguided regulation can inhibit the chemical industry's ability to further sustainability objectives.

Better emissions rules needed

The EU is close to adopting a compromise text of the Industrial Emissions Directive, which is aimed at overhauling existing legislation on emissions from industrial and agricultural activities.

After the advocacy process, a compromise text was adopted that provides for much more flexibility than the original proposal. For example, it will be possible for competent authorities to adapt required measures to local environmental conditions and the technical profile of the installations concerned.

Through the directive, the European Commission intends to redirect efforts to reduce emissions and align them to meet 2020 targets under the EU's Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution. This would be achieved by helping national governments and industry implement and enforce emissions rules and raising standards across the board: Industrial installations would be granted permits based on their ability to apply best available techniques.

Striking the right balance between economic, environmental and social aspects will continue to be important during the implementation phase of the directive.