

Workers and employers of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry undertake various joint activities to continuously improve the health, safety and environmental performance of their sector. The best example is their wide ranging cooperation on the chemical industry's unique voluntary performance initiative, Responsible Care, and its leading product stewardship practices.

In 2003 the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG), the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation (EMCEF), and European Chemical Industry Council, Cefic, signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Responsible Care.

Since then, EMCEF and ECEG have worked closely with chemical employers and trade unions of member states on a range of initiatives.

For example, trade union representatives work with their colleagues in the Czech chemicals association on verification of company Responsible Care implementation to assure real performance improvements are being achieved; in France the partners cooperate on a Responsible Care initiative to improve contractor safety; education and training on agrochemicals use is aimed particularly at seasonal migrant workers in Southern Europe.

A promising step is the cross-sector cooperation on OHS in workplaces of the construction industry to raise awareness and improve the safe handling of chemicals.

Responsible Care has proved complementary to the ongoing dialogue of the Social Partners and to specific EU projects targeting improvement in health and safety at the workplace.

We are confident that the best practices and experiences of this work can be taken up by other EU member states and that wider cooperation under the Responsible Care initiative will help build trust between the Social Partners, offer examples to other industry sectors, and prove an effective means of achieving continuous performance improvement throughout the chemicals sector, as well as its contractors and customers.

Our co-operations in this area also lead to a much wider agenda of working together on associated and separate areas across Europe's industrial, social and environmental challenges.

The Social Partners in the European chemicals sector devote considerable efforts to ensuring high standards of occupational health and safety (OHS) for workers in chemical and pharmaceutical businesses across the continent.

With the latest Working Programme of the Sector Social Dialogue Committee Chemical Industry (2009-2010) we extended the scope of our OHS activities to contractors on industry sites, the prisme² project to spread Responsible Care to small and medium-sized companies and the cooperation in campaigns of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao.

An important new item on our working programme focuses on activities around the development of nano-technologies, their relevance for the future competitiveness of the industry and possible regulations in this area. Together with OHS improvement, we also strive for responsible management of chemicals. We can maximize our efforts by working together as the Social Partner organisations representing management and labour at European and national level.

Such cooperation can lead to improvements in a number of areas such as OHS particularly in some of the new and candidate member states in Central and East Europe, in SMEs, and for downstream users of chemicals.



R. Reibsch

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Simon Marsh

Simon Marsh
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“The Social Dialogue between management and labour in our industries is essential to the European Social Model.”

“The joint promotion of occupational health and safety by the chemical industry Social Partners on European and national level has turned out as a big success and this path should be followed further. With Responsible Care, the chemical industry is running a unique initiative for continuous improvement on environment, health and safety as well as on stakeholder dialogue.”

Vladimír Špidla Former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities