

Communicating chemicals safety downstream

Helping companies make informed decisions on the safe use of chemicals, based on science and risk



Peter Smith
Cefic executive director, product stewards

The growing public debate around chemical safety is welcomed by industry, and Echa continues to make great strides in making information on safety more harmonised and available. Nevertheless, there is a demand, particularly in the business-to-business sphere, for greater clarity on the safe use of substances, and less confusion. For this reason, the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA) is prioritising a drive to harmonise the way safety data is collected and disseminated, to improve both safety and trust and respond to this growing call for information.

Chemical industry associations, working through the ICCA, are promoting common principles for communicating chemical safety downstream.

The initiative was developed, using as its base an ICCA survey of chemical companies in the US, Europe and Asia. This identified factors, like the dynamic regulatory environment and growing public awareness about chemicals in products, which can lead to a lack of clarity on which products are safe for which applications. As a consequence, detailed information on the composition of supplied products is more frequently requested by all kinds of stakeholders across the value chain. Industry also receives lists of chemicals their customers wish to see reduced or eliminated from their products, despite the lack of science or risk basis for doing this. And while the assessment of product hazards and risks is well established, players across the value chain are now taking this even further, including them, for example, in company policies. They can be pivotal in purchase decisions.

Software interoperability must be improved

The ICCA project, to enhance informed

business-to-business purchasing decisions downstream, based on the chemical risk profile, exposure and properties, is important. At the moment, software that chemical companies use to inform clients about the safe application of their products is heterogeneous. The growing number of software platforms can compromise clarity, when customers are trying to compare safety information, for example. Conclusions regarding the same product can sometimes differ, with no explanation or lack of transparency on how these were reached. Another challenge for



Cefic's product stewardship manager Stéphane Content

industry, caused by this lack of clarity around chemical safety, is the regulatory uncertainty it can cause. Unpredictable, subjective and changing perceptions of different products can impact industry's capacity to build a commercial strategy that works for the long term and best serves client industries that rely on their products.

Promoting better harmonisation

As part of the ICCA project, evaluators examined the way chemical safety information is communicated across the supply chain. For example, how a chemical producer delivers information to a customer industry that needs to make a decision on which product to use, such as in the

electronic or automotive industries. The ICCA used its work to develop common voluntary principles which all software producers can integrate into their templates, aiming to both improve the commonality between programmes but also increase the likelihood that client industries, across the value chain, will be better informed on safety.

Next steps in 2017

Led by Cefic product stewardship manager, Stéphane Content, the ICCA is promoting a balanced approach to chemicals management and product selection decisions, including those based on safety, science and lifecycle considerations and performance throughout the value chain. It will work towards reducing the complexity caused by the multitude of the approaches to assessment and encourage company transparency, by promoting harmonisation based on these sound principles.

The ICCA has identified the electronics sector as a priority, to test the communication principles through the supply chain. A first [workshop](#) was organised in May 2016 in Europe and the concepts proposed were welcomed.

A second initiative was organised in the US at a leading electronics trade show. A next step will be to hold an event in Asia, this year, to spread the message in this important chemical manufacturing region.

Project leaders are working with different industry software suppliers to inform them about these principles and encourage their integration. The response has so far been positive. Further outreach in the form of education, capacity building and initiatives, to bring together the chemical industry with all relevant stakeholders, will be undertaken throughout 2017 as awareness grows around the implementation of the principles.

The views expressed in contributed articles are those of the expert authors and are not necessarily shared by Chemical Watch.