Two Names – One Sustainability
Chemical Industry Should Seek to Unify ESAD, TIS

In 2011 six European chemical companies joined to create the "Together for Sustainability" initiative (TIS), which now has 12 members in Europe and the US (compare article on the opposite page).

The companies organized in the German Chemical Distribution Association (Verband Chemiehandel, VCH), in light of the isolated parallel approaches of the chemical manufacturers to the subject of sustainability, view TIS with some concern.

Foundation Of Sustainability

Since the beginning of the 90s, together with the manufacturers, chemical distributors have practiced the Responsible Care Initiative which since then has covered the core sector of the chemical industry – particularly with regard to sustainability before sustainability had even become part of the general discussion.

At the end of the 90s, the chemical industry extended its Safety and Quality Assessment System (SQAS), which is designed for logistics service providers, to include chemical distributors as well, and in the process, created the European Single Assessment Document (ESAD). This provides a uniform evaluation method with which, using standardized questionnaires, independent and specially trained technical experts judge quality, safety and environmental standards.

In the meantime, the program run by the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) over many years has become established and proved its value in chemical distribution. This is illustrated by the fact that about 50% of the companies that participate in the Responsible Care program of the VCH use ESAD to verify their commitment. Currently, there are about 250 active ESAD assessments.

Looking For Harmony

About 1½ years ago, the first chemical distributors were contacted by the TIS initiative. This initiative for sustainability, developed by some large European chemical manufacturers, stands unfortunately completely isolated from the ESAD system and Responsible Care, which were also initiated by the chemical industry. As a result, at an early stage, the VCH contacted the operators of the TIS initiative with the idea of finding possibilities of a coordination of the initiatives – which ultimately are run by the same protagonists. Together with our European umbrella organization Facc and Cefic, these efforts have led to an extension of the corresponding ESAD questionnaire to include the missing parts from TIS. The reasoning behind this adaptation was a reciprocal recognition of the initiatives of the chemical manufacturers to avoid double audits and to be able to continue using the tried and tested ESAD system.

Unfortunately – and surprisingly – the manufacturers have, until now, not been able to reconcile the two systems. On the contrary, the chemical distributors are now being pressured to implement both the TIS and ESAD systems parallel to each other although the contents are essentially the same. This means not only answering questionnaires with the same contents, but also carrying out basically the same resource-intensive audits without any additional benefit for sustainability.

Chemical distributors are forced to make the best of a bad job because the protagonists of TIS assert their system with great pressure and short deadlines for their contract partners. This procedure gives rise to the fear that failure to compromise between both systems will, in the end, damage the acceptance of both initiatives. Two parallel systems from the chemical manufacturers with basically the same content are difficult to communicate to the addresses, and they entail the hazard that these systems will cannibalize each other to the detriment of existing structures.

Streamlining Sustainability

As demonstrated by the commitment described at the beginning of this statement, the VCH and its members wholeheartedly support the goal of sustainability and thus, in the end, both initiatives. However, they continue to emphasize the necessity of avoiding a doubling of contents and systems. As suppliers and service providers of the chemical industry as well as the addresses of the systems, the chemical distributors have only very limited possibilities. They can only appeal to the manufacturers as the operators of both ESAD and TIS, in particular also for the sake of sustainability, to find a possibility of mutual recognition in the short term. Today, we already support this process within the realms of possibility.

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Distribution & Logistics | for the chemical and life science industries | 17