

## RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT IN THE CHEMICAL TRADE

One important issue of Verband Chemiehandel (VCH)'s Responsible Care (RC) Programme is the dialogue with the chemical distributor's customers and suppliers, with the media, politicians and neighbours – in brief, with all interested groups of society. This should especially be accentuated in the "Year of Chemistry 2003", which is to promote the dialogue between science and interested public as well as highlight chemistry's significance as one of Germany's most important economic factors.



7 years ago, the chemical trading companies joined in Verband Chemiehandel decided to take part in the worldwide RC Initiative – with the "Chemical Trade's Guidelines for the Safe Handling of Chemicals, their Marketing as well as the Information of the Public" constituting the central element of VCH's RC Programme. When a company enters the programme, the management commits itself to above guidelines. This commitment is consequently documented by a certificate confirming fulfilment of all formalities and requirements of the programme, as well as dedication to its ethical principles.



Among others, the above-mentioned guidelines request public relation activities from companies taking part in the RC Programme. To their best individual capability, they are to lead an open dialogue with all interested groups concerning safety, health and environment in order to create a climate of trust. The Annual RC Report, which we are presenting already for the sixth time, is one important element of this dialogue. It informs about chemical trade and distribution's engagement for a sustainable development and lists the results achieved in 2002 (see overleaf).

The Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 again highlighted the concept of sustainability and acknowledged the common responsibility of all nations in the world to answer to this challenge. Because sustainable development means growth that satisfies the needs of the present without

impairing those of future generations and of people in other parts of the world.

To this effect the chemical distributor commits himself to strive for explicit improvements in production and application of a product during its complete life cycle ("from the cradle to the grave"). For more details, also concerning supervision of the RC Programme, please see VCH's Customer Information "RC".



In addition to the Annual RC Report, the chemical traders also publicize information about legally or technically important aspects of their daily work by way of "VCH Customer Information" brochures and individual company leaflets of high standard.

A new approach to public relations is "Chemini.doc". This project was started last year and intends to familiarize chiefly pupils from 7 to 12 years with chemistry, to bring down barriers, and to communicate that within the scope of RC chemical trade and chemical industry handle their products in a responsible way. Taking sodium bicarbonate as an example, the supply chain of a chemical product is shown from producer to consumer, in an easily comprehensible way. All important aspects of storage, labelling, transport, information and instruction of the customer concerning the safe handling of chemicals are covered.



The "Chemini.doc" package comprises a video with 8 languages to choose from, a CD-ROM with detailed further information for the teacher and a parcel of sodium bicarbonate for accompanying experiments.

Numerous responses to "Chemini.doc" have clearly shown that there is a demand for age-adequate information and that the offer for a public dialogue is readily accepted.

# Responsible Care - Annual Report 2002

## Responsible Conduct in the Chemical Trade

Once again, the number of companies participating in VCH's RC Programme has increased: 55 out of presently 97 VCH member companies have joined the initiative till May 2003. However, in order to reach accurate results, the questionnaire "Indicators of Performance" was presented only to those companies which have been taking part in the Programme for the whole time reviewed, i.e. since January 2002. The evaluation therefore only refers to 45 companies with 94 sites (2001: 44/80) and 4,230 (4,026) employees amounting to 60% of jobs represented by VCH.

Just under two thirds of these companies concentrate on stock-keeping distribution with a product range of acids, alkalis, solvents, solids, and specialities.

After expiration of the second 3-year period (1999-2002), the participants have again been audited by the external expert as stipulated by Element 5 of the RC Programme. These on-site audits showed that the Programme has meanwhile become established and that a continuous improvement process can be observed in all RC Elements.

**Responsible Care - "Responsible Conduct in the Chemical Trade" - this comprises following features:**

### Product responsibility

All health, safety and environmental aspects of a product are considered by the chemical distributor during the product's entire life cycle. Last year, just under 130,000 customers (incl. multiple entries) were supplied with chemical products. Product responsibility is also and foremostly shown by the distributors when they choose their contractors, i.e. their suppliers and logistic partners: Compared to the previous years, an increasing number of meanwhile 70% of these suppliers and logistic partners as well as 54% of service providers are by now certified according to ISO 9001, 14000, EMAS, or RC. Just under 24,000 safety data sheets were newly established, revised or, if need be, updated last year (+ 5,700). This demonstrates that accompanying product information continues to be seen as a core element of RC.

### Company organisation, assignment of responsibilities, and supervision

The on-site audits showed that RC has become established in the companies as an on-going topic, with widespread employee involvement. Correspondingly, previous years' results have stabilized on a high level. Also the management's involvement in implementing RC is satisfactory: The number of RC-related discussions and consultations held by chief executives remained unchanged at 14 per company. However, it will be an important task for the future to optimize in-house dialogue within the companies, especially with the RC Coordinator. During the evaluated period an average of 5 internal events with the focus on RC took place. RC Coordinators' staff contributed to the execution of the RC Programme with an average of 60 hours.

### Plant safety and danger defence

Also in 2002, chemical trade's high technical standards and its safety awareness were reflected by the low number of accidents with incoming goods. Measured against a total delivery increased by 14% to 1.73 million tons there happened only 36 accidents, and in this number even smallest amounts of accidental releases were recorded as an incident. This means that there was only one accident per 50,000 tons of delivered products. 4 cases (2 in the previous year) included contamination of soil and/or water. 97 % of the recorded alarms were false alarms, which shows that chemical trade's safety systems react also to minor irregularities, thus making it possible to take the necessary safety precautions at a very early stage.

### Labour safety and health protection

Seen against the total amount of delivered products, the number of reported occupational accidents is decreasing. 33 of the 135 reported accidents included chemical interaction, the remaining part were accidents caused by mechanical influence (tripping etc.). Also last year,

occupational safety and health protection were promoted by hazardous substance trainings according to § 20 para 2 of the Hazardous Substances Ordinance (2 per employee) and an average of 3 on-site inspections by the responsible authorities.

### Environmental protection

In the year of the report, 991,153 tons of liquid chemicals were bottled by the participating companies (-5%). With 80%, the share of products bottled using emission-decreasing measures remained at previous years' continually high level. In the remaining cases such measures were not yet used due to business-administrative, technical or material-related reasons.

### Transport safety

Initial and advanced training of dangerous goods drivers, dangerous goods officers and authorized personnel was again a central issue of the member companies' care for transport safety last year. Total mileage of all commercial vehicles (442) rose by 17% to 24.4 million kilometres. The number of governmental complaints decreased from 62 to 54, that of penalty notices from 31 to 21. As a result of the responsible care shown by all parties involved only 3 out of 141 transport accidents recorded physical injuries (1) or environmental damage (2). Still, it will remain an important task within the scope of RC to maintain this high level and further improve it where possible.

### Dialogue - information of the public

Responsible Care has by now become an established element in all areas of public relations. Employees regularly use the programme for the external presentation of their company, utilizing, among others, the present Annual Report as well as further high-standard company brochures (see overleaf). A better understanding of chemistry in general and function and importance of the chemical trade in particular is being promoted mostly by personal talks with all interested parties.

A more detailed presentation of the results can be ordered from VCH office and can be seen directly in the Internet: [www.vch-online.de](http://www.vch-online.de). Here, you can also find the RC Reports for the last few years as well as further information about chemical trade and distribution.

Wishing for a further positive development of Responsible Care on European and international level, i.e. by the joint efforts of all parties involved in the global RC Initiative, we remain

Your chemical trading company