

A winning way

Even small and medium-sized companies can embrace product stewardship and corporate social responsibility, as CSC Jaeklechemie shows

JOHN BAKER/PRAQUE

EUROPEAN AND global regulations on chemical safety – such as Reach and the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals – are putting increasing emphasis on communication of information up and down the supply chain, as well as to the end-user.

This is raising the bar in terms of the industry's adoption of product stewardship, whereby producers and distributors take responsibility for the use of their chemicals.

One sector that has taken a positive approach to product stewardship over the past decade is the European solvents industry. The approach has been led by the European Solvents Industry Group (ESIG), which incorporates the major producers of hydrocarbon and oxygenated solvents in Europe.

Among its activities to promote best practice in product stewardship, ESIG organizes a biannual Product Stewardship Award that recognizes companies that achieve significant health, safety and environmental improvements in the handling, storage, use or transportation of solvents. First created in 1999, it is designed to showcase and reward excellence and continuous progress in these areas.

This year's winner is CSC Jaeklechemie, a medium-sized, family-owned distributor of specialty and industrial chemicals, based in Nuremberg, Germany. The award was presented at the Cefic Responsible Care meeting in Prague, the Czech Republic, in October.

ETHICAL APPROACH

The company's entry, Solvents in the 21st Century – New Approaches in Product and Environmental Safety Create a New Type of Customer Orientation, convinced the jury of Jaeklechemie's "ethical management of chemicals, of its extraordinary social responsibility scheme and its comprehensive product stewardship program along the value chain."

Jaeklechemie managing partner Robert



Left: Dieter Reif, purchasing manager and right: Robert Spaeth, managing partner, both of CSC Jaeklechemie

“By open and honest communication... we have achieved higher acceptance”

Robert Spaeth, managing partner, CSC Jaeklechemie

Spaeth says the company emphasizes product stewardship and sustainability. “By integrating environmental protection and social responsibility, we are able to improve our business processes. Sustainability is not an add-on. Business reality shows that it creates long-term economic success.”

The company, which has sales of around €86m (\$129m) and employs 122 people, handles 90,000 tonnes/year of chemicals. Since 1990, investments totaling €50m have been made to modernize its entire site in Nuremberg, and recently, the company has completed a €10m investment, improving plant efficiency, safety and occupational health and environmental protection. All operation is now based on the company's

single Nuremberg site, following a period of consolidation closing some smaller sites.

For a medium-sized company, Jaeklechemie puts a lot of effort into its corporate and social responsibilities. In terms of product stewardship, it advises and trains its customers in all possible problem areas, including use and disposal of products and compliance with relevant legislation.

For its own employees, it runs an annual training week on safety, quality and environmental topics, and for new customers, it carries out site inspections before first deliveries are made. In the case of sensitive products it also requires a final disposal declaration.

And in terms of dialogue with the public, it participates in various environmental projects and keeps regular communication with schools in the areas surrounding its facilities. It provides information kits for pupils and offers guided tours to schoolchildren.

Says Spaeth: “By open and honest communication with our neighbors, government agencies and the political system, we have achieved a higher acceptance for our site.”

The overall approach is evidently successful. Spaeth points out that the company has been expanding from its base in southern Germany and central Europe, and is now doing business through offices in Prague, the Czech Republic, and Budapest, Hungary.

It distributes mainly acids, alkalis and solvents in its home market, but is driving geographical expansion through its specialty chemical offerings. It is well known in Germany, Austria and Switzerland as a supplier of more than 1,000 specialty products for the coatings industry.

Spaeth is also now taking the company into more specialized areas, such as food ingredients, 1,2-propylene glycol to US Pharmacopeia standards and food-grade citric acid solution. The company will use the award to further its dialogue with the public and other stakeholders, to maintain its image and high approval rating. ■