



For immediate release

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Treading the line – article on EuPC published in Converting Today

Leading a confederation of associations, it is politically astute to stand back from single sector issues. But a common cause requires firm action from a united industry. Alexandre Dangis performs just such a balancing act.

EuPC began 20 years ago with 12 founding national members. That number has risen to 50, having merged with two existing bodies, one representing calendaring and coatings, the other injection moulding.

With an equal split between national plastics sector associations and product sectors, the challenge for Mr Dangis is to take positions that express the interests of all the members. EuPC also has to make sure that there are enough resources to fund the support of separate and various issues.

Mr Dangis believes the plastics industry can work proactively without the need for burdensome legislation. One such example is Vinyl 2020, a voluntary programme for sustainable development by the whole PVC industry.

The plastics industry needs to get across a complex message to civil servants, who are the decision makers, and it is an aim of EuPC 'to bring knowledge to the EU institutions and show them what each material is', says Mr Dangis.

He has to know when to stand back to protect the association's impartiality: "If there is no common position, hands off and let a sector defend its own position".

His view on sustainability in plastics is the need to internalise external costs. In practice this means that cost-bearing consequences of the use of plastics should be accounted for as part of the whole cost system: "We push industries to do this".

Shared responsibility, as it is termed, plays a part in meeting 'end of waste' and recovery costs, for example.

"This process is going on but it won't make things [finished materials and products] cheaper," he says - a blow that the user chain will have to take on the chin.

"To take the step from producer responsibility to extended producer responsibility, we are working through life cycle analysis and carbon footprint together."



He sees a communication gap at the final user stage of the plastics cycle. “Brand owners close to the consumer have to communicate better down the supply chain.” Successfully engaging home consumers will help improve LCA outcomes and carbon levels, he thinks.

Marine litter

On the debate around marine litter, arguably ‘an over-exaggerated problem’ in his view, Mr Dangis tells me a research project is ‘making slow progress’.

Converters are working with the raw material producers represented by Plastics Europe on a project expected to last several years.

“It will start slow and build up as it gets more people on board,” he says, with research into many areas including the toxicity of micro-plastics in seafood.

“Industry is now aware it can’t just sit down and do nothing.”

EuPC sees marine littering as an education issue, ‘but the fact it’s happening means that we want to initiate action’.

“We have a basic agreement with Plastics Europe to jointly encourage ‘issue leaders’ in every country to talk to schools and local and national authorities about how to deal better with plastics.

“Especially in packaging, by not doing something, the harm to the industry could be enormous,” says Mr Dangis.

The industry should make a contribution to recovery and recycling or ‘be destroyed through wrong perceptions’, he warns.

“Consumers are sensitive - and the industry is a consumer, too, on a worldwide level. We are from small companies. We want things to happen now - not to be dealing with procedural operations.

“We are pushing the other side of the supply chain [users] and need it to feel involved.”

For starters, industry users must accept the fact that plastics have been ‘cheap’. Sustainable plastics use recycled material, ‘which has its price and should not be undervalued’.

“The EU should push this [use of recycled material] through at global level because globalisation has had a negative effect on sustainability,” he says.

Asked what he judges as successes in his EuPC role, Mr Dangis replies: “Most successes are those you don’t see – issues that are nipped in the bud.”

A priority is to avoid legislation - a heavy industry burden, he says, because European Directives have different meanings in different member states.



“Legislation is a control system that PVC has avoided so far. Vision 2020 has gained the sector time and we [EuPC] want to convince PVC to raise its targets in the next years.”

Driven by retailers, former PVC packaging users have been switching to improved PET while PVC has clinched business in windows and flooring.

Proof that without legislation, market forces decide.

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