Tackling the industry challenges through voluntary initiatives

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ABSTRACT: A.I.S.E. has been the voice of the International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products across Europe for the last sixty years. As a pioneer and trendsetter in many areas (voluntary initiatives, legislative matters, stakeholder dialogue and international co-operation), A.I.S.E. has a devoted interest to benefiting society by contributing to the sustainable improvement of the quality and comfort of life through hygiene and cleanliness, in a free, competitive and innovative way. This article will focus on two main areas of activity at the heart of the association’s work towards sustainable progress: the Charter for Sustainable Cleaning which is driving high industry sustainability standards and in parallel, A.I.S.E.’s proactive voluntary projects that contribute to the industry’s regulatory framework. Its priorities in this domain include:

- the Classification, Labelling and Packaging of Substances (CLP), a voluntary programme that investigates methods to classify detergent and cleaning product formulations;
- the industry classification network (ICN) which builds on data and expertise to facilitate a consistent classification approach and interpretation of expert judgement for skin/eye irritancy classification under CLP.

These voluntary activities and regulatory projects are vital in tackling the challenges that face the industry now and in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The European detergents, cleaning and maintenance products industry, individually and collectively through A.I.S.E., has a long track record of commitment to safeguarding consumers and the environment. As A.I.S.E. launches, in June 2012, its annual review and sustainability report for 2011-2012, it looks back on another action packed year. Significant achievements have been made in both voluntary initiatives and regulatory matters, despite the difficult macroeconomic environment and slow growth of the sector. The combined network membership of A.I.S.E. represented by more than 900 companies, 60 percent of which are being small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), reaches out to a vast number of consumers and professional customers in delivering cleanliness, hygiene and well-being inside and outside of the home for the benefit of all. This remarkable outreach in Europe plays a huge part in being the recognised voice of the sector in Europe and securing A.I.S.E.’s success to date.

DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH VOLUNTARY INITIATIVES

A.I.S.E.’s most encompassing scheme, the Charter for Sustainable Cleaning, is committed to offering the most advanced sustainability assurance for promoting best practice within the industry, using Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and science as a basis (see Figure 1). The vision is to offer the most advanced sustainability reference scheme for steering best practice in the industry.

The Charter was launched in 2005 in all EU countries as well as Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

It is open to all companies, as well as A.I.S.E. members and covers all product categories of A.I.S.E.’s portfolio, whether in the household or industrial and institutional sectors. The number of companies signing up to the A.I.S.E. Charter for Sustainable Cleaning has shown distinct growth over the past year alone. As at May 2012, A.I.S.E. is proud to comprise of more than 175 companies committed to the Charter, covering more than 85 percent of the industry’s volume output in Europe. The requirements outlined in the scheme go beyond legal requests and it is the benchmark tool for companies and the industry at large to achieve high sustainability standards for the sector.
SUSTAINABILITY

ASPs have been defined to date for laundry detergents, fabric conditioners and automatic dishwashing detergents. A.I.S.E. is pleased to see the first products meeting the Charter’s Advanced Sustainability Profiles on supermarket shelves. These provide consumers with products of high industry sustainability standards, both from the manufacturing and product design point of view, please see Figure 3. However the potential for savings that occur during the use phase highlights the need for industry and relevant stakeholders to also engage with consumers towards the sustainable use of products. A.I.S.E. started this journey 15 years ago with ‘on pack’ information and also with its multilingual cleanright.eu portal.

To access further detailed ASP criteria, please visit: www.sustainable-cleaning.com/en.companyarea_documentation.orb

Indicating sustainability on-pack
Compliance of the Charter scheme may be displayed on products according to specific guidance provided by A.I.S.E., as illustrated below.

Promoting sustainable consumption
A.I.S.E. and its members are continuously working on communications and information campaigns to promote the sustainable use of clearing products. Consumer education has been organised for promotion on packs, either for the safe use of products or their sustainable consumption. In 2012 A.I.S.E. released, in consistency with the Laundry Washright Panel, the Autodish Cleanright Panel to promote sustainable use of automatic dishwashing detergents by consumers. Tips relating to these panels are being relayed on the consumer portal www.cleanright.eu. Since its launch this site has received more than 150,000 visitors.

So how does the charter work?
The Charter stipulates a set of twelve Charter Sustainability Procedures (CSPs) which companies implement in their management systems. Six are “essential” CSPs which have to be applied to a majority of the production, rising to twelve CSPs after three years. These are the threshold requirements for signing up to the Charter and are verified by an independent external verifier. The other six CSPs, which are “additional”, are added for the first re-verification three years after joining the Charter and for subsequent three yearly re-verifications.

Once the criteria are met and verified, companies effectively sign up to the project. They are then entitled to use the Charter logos, which certify that the company is following sustainability principles, giving priority to improvements in people’s safety, environmental compatibility and to other key aspects of sustainability, without compromising product performance. Companies then have to report annually on 11 KPs linked to the CSPs, which are externally aggregated and published in the annual review and sustainability report. Please see Figure 2 for an overview of key KPI highlights for 2011 versus 2010.

Product dimension - advanced sustainability profiles (ASPs)
The introduction of the “product dimension”, characterised by the “Advanced Sustainability Profiles” (ASPs), is a result of feedback gained from stakeholder consultation and is also closely aligned with the overall objectives of the EU Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the Sustainable Industry Policy (SCP/ SIP) Action Plan and the objectives of the Ecodesign Directive.

Notes: The packaging in both charts is provided for illustration purposes only. The Charter logo may apply to any products of the soap, detergent and maintenance industry. Only one Charter logo may be used on pack.

Figure 1. The charter: a comprehensive scheme promoting high industry standards along the life cycle stages.

Figure 2. KPI Highlights 2011 – full Sustainability Report available from www.aise.eu

Figure 3. Key Parameters for Advanced Sustainable Profiles for household laundry detergents.

Figure 4. Charter logos.

Example of an Advanced Sustainable Profile for household laundry detergents:

1. Environmental Safety Check (ESC)
2. Resource Efficiency
   - Concentration
   - Packaging efficiency
   - Use of recycled packaging materials
3. Consumer Information

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Figure 4. Charter logos.
The CLP Regulation and Safe Use Communication
The primary concern of A.I.S.E. Member Companies is to ensure consumer safety from use of products. For that purpose the development of a robust, transparent and externally recognised system to achieve appropriate classification and labelling across Europe is important for A.I.S.E. Classification and Labelling of mixtures for household detergents and cleaning products will become mandatory under the CLP Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 from June 2015. CLP is of critical importance to the sector as it governs the classification and subsequent labelling of all products in the A.I.S.E. portfolio. It is critical that industry can meet the new legal requirements in a way that allows consumers to:
- Recognise the hazard
- Distinguish between products of different hazards
- Understand a relevant label

Tackling the challenges of the CLP regulation through voluntary industry action
The impact of the CLP Regulation for A.I.S.E. products, using the default classification by calculation, would lead to many more daily use products being more severely classified and labelled (see figure 5).

Figure 5.

A.I.S.E.’s INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR CLP
Adequate safety assessment for skin and eye effects, in an “animal-free” and “human-free” manner

NEW METHOD AND DATA GENERATION (in-vitro)
Objective: Investigate the applicability of currently available in-vitro skin and eye irritation/corrosion test methods to classify detergent and cleaning product formulations.

Status:
- Skin: Some methods found suitable for classification of hand dishwashing liquids, hand wash/crin mildness laundry detergents and bleaches. Products with direct skin contact not expected to be irritant, others expected to be skin category 2.
- Eye: Assessment of existing methods on going.

Timing: Completion of the project is expected by the end of 2012.

INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION NETWORK (ICN)
Objective: Sharing of data and expertise to facilitate appropriate classification and consistent interpretation of expert judgment for skin/eye irritation classification under CLP by the whole industry.

Principles:
- Open to all companies from the sector (membership fees)
- Involvement of external and internal experts
- Sharing of toxicity data (185 formulations)


Products in scope: solid and liquid laundry detergents, hand dishwash detergents, all purpose cleaners.

Figure 6. A.I.S.E.’s Integrated strategy for classification, labelling and packaging.

This default classification would then result in:
- Not reflecting actual effects on man
- Devaluing warning labels, with the risk to no longer recognise really hazardous products
- Leading to unsafe practices
- Confusing poison centres and consumers

A.I.S.E. is tackling these issues with an ambitious 3 year project by industry to secure adequate and collective implementation of CLP, initiated in 2010. Its objective is to secure adequate data generation and use for safety assessment, and thus, classification and labelling of products. This project comprising of two main pillars is being developed with high level expertise and in close relation with external stakeholders: (see figure 6).

CONCLUSION
These highlights are only a snapshot of all the work that A.I.S.E. is delivering to secure the adequate implementation of the various policy developments and to drive the sustainability agenda. In that spirit, the dynamism of the sector and its proactivity to work together internally as a strong network and externally with its stakeholders is helping to contribute to a harmonised situation across Europe that will help shape the future of the industry. A.I.S.E. looks forward to continued endeavours in working towards a more sustainable environment and is committed to its mission to communicate effectively and objectively the values embodied in the industry vision and in related policies to all appropriate stakeholders, whilst taking these stakeholders’ views into account. To access the full A.I.S.E. Activity and Sustainability report please visit www.aise.eu.