

INDUSTRY FOCUS ON: PLASTICS & PVC

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PVC industry sees looming clash between chemicals law and recycling

Europe's major pipeline manufacturers vow to end the use of lead in hard plastics within two years, but fear proposals to add the metal to a list of dangerous substances would be counterproductive to their efforts to recycle old materials.

Some European Union nations already prohibit lead content in polyvinyl chloride pipes, widely used in urban water and wastewater systems, and home plumbing. Efforts are under way to include some lead compounds as substances of high concern in the EU's REACH chemicals regulation.

The EU's main manufacturers of polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, pipes have voluntarily agreed to eliminate the use of lead as a stabiliser in the manufacturing process by 2015. Some companies have achieved the goal earlier, carrying through pledges first made in 2000 and reiterated at the Rio+20 sustainable development conference last June.

Yet the European industry fears that proposals to expand the list of harmful



Old PVC pipes and windows can be made into new products.

substances under REACH could harm another sustainability pledge made by the industry – to gradually replace virgin materials with material recycled from old PVC pipes.

“This would be, in my mind, a disaster,” Roel van't Veer of the European Plastic Pipes and Fittings Association, or TEPPFA, said of proposals by a few EU national governments and environmental groups to restrict recycled materials that contain lead or other chemicals and metals with potentially harmful impact of human health or the ecology.

“The chemical directive was intended, logically, for the chemicals industry,” van't Veer told EurActiv. “What it has not taken into account are the effects on waste and waste recycling.”

The pipeline industry is not alone in expressing such concerns. Other industries fear REACH could affect their efforts to

reuse end-of life goods, and European Commission officials have acknowledged the potential for such conflicts.

EU national representatives are scheduled to discuss expanding the REACH chemicals directive to include 21 lead compounds when they meet next week at the European Chemicals Agency in Helsinki. The compounds include those used as PVC stabilisers, but also in batteries, crystal, ceramics, rubber products and fuel additives.

Metal stabilisers are used in the manufacturing process to strengthen PVC during the production and moulding process, and in window frames and other products to prevent them from losing their lustre when exposed to sunlight.

Rio sustainability commitments

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TEPPFA members have pledged to phase out lead stabilisers and gradually boost recycling as part of the commitments made by the European PVC industry. TEPPFA says it recycled 4,000 tonnes in 2001 and nearly 60,000 tonnes last year.

The European PVC industry agreed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio to reduce its resource footprint by reclaiming 800,000 tonnes of PVC per year by 2020 – compared to the 255,000 the industry achieved in 2010. The VinylPlus project also commits the industry to phase out the use of lead by 2015, and to establish an industry label certifying PVC products as sustainable.

The voluntary commitment comes in the absence of EU regulations on lead stabilisers in PVC pipes despite a history of health concerns over the use of lead, also known by its chemical symbol of Pb.

High levels of lead stabilisers in PVC pipes raised health concerns in the 1970s and '80s as the durable, nearly leak-proof piping flourished as a replacement for metal and wood pipes, while homeowners turned to the plastic piping as a cheaper alternative to copper water pipes.

The PVC industry itself came under fire a generation ago over employee

exposure to lead dust and particles in the manufacturing process. Exposure to lead dust can cause high blood pressure, kidney problems and mental slowness in adults; in children, it has been linked to retarded physical and mental development and learning disabilities.

Health officials and consumer groups have particularly expressed concern lead content in early generations of PVC pipes.

Meanwhile, the International Chemical Secretariat, a Swedish group that campaigns against hazardous chemicals, has pressed for tougher European standards on chemicals and has faulted the businesses and the chemicals industry for failing to find non-toxic substitutes for stabilisers and other substances. It publishes a 'SIN List' of 378 substances that it considers toxic to human health, including a number of stabilisers used in polystyrene, plastics and glass.

Efforts to minimise exposure

PVC manufacturers have cleaned up their production process to minimise worker's exposure, in part through mechanisation. The industry expresses confidence that today's products are safe and are produced with 100% lead free

than the earlier generation of pipes and make up only a fraction of a pipe's mass. Officials say countless studies have shown there is no health or environmental impact from today's PVC water pipes or other productions.

Under the VinylPlus initiative, the PVC industry plans to introduce a sustainability label to highlight its targets to reduce energy and resource consumption, increase recycling and shift to calcium-based and organic stabilisers.

Some European manufacturers have voluntarily replaced lead stabilisers in water pipe, but industry officials say that while they are convinced of the safety of their products, consumer perceptions may still be coloured by health and safety concerns.

"The one thing that you do not want as an industry is running the risk that people will start asking questions about this [safety]," van't Veer, who heads the TEPPFA voluntary commitment programme, said of the group's promise to eliminate lead stabilisers. "We do not think that we are extremely green ... this is sound business strategy. When you see that you are running risks somewhere, you try to prevent these. That was the reason to find alternatives on a voluntary basis to replace lead."

Industry aims to 'close the loop' on resource use

Six months after the Rio+20 Earth Summit, a Belgian company, Deceuninck Nv., has begun living up to the plastic industry's voluntary commitments by turning discarded doors, windows and other goods made with PVC into new products.

Criticised for being short on details and weak on government action, the Rio+20 Earth Summit nonetheless earned good marks for businesses that used the international gathering as a stage to launch their own environmental initiatives.

Dozens of multinational corporations pledged in Brazil to become more planet-friendly and transparent in their reporting on sustainability measures.

Europe's vinyl industry, for its part, agreed to a replace lead additives, cut energy use and boost the recycling of polyvinyl chloride plastics (PVC) that are commonly used in urban water pipes as well as household plumbing, windows and doors.

Six months since the summit and some 9,300 kilometres from Rio de Janeiro,

a Belgian company has begun living up to that commitment, doing what EU Environment Commission Janez Potočnik recently called for all businesses to do: "to recycle, to substitute, to reduce and to make resources go further."

Deceuninck Nv., which has been manufacturing doors and windows since before the Second World War, has inaugurated a new recycling plant that company officials say dramatically reduces its reliance on virgin resources by turning discarded doors, windows and other goods made with PVC into new products.

"Today we close the loop," said Tom Debusschere, Deceuninck's chief executive, referring to circle of the company's goods

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from production, to use and to end-of-life reuse.

“PVC is a valuable material and should not end-up in a landfill or incinerator,” Debusschere said at the 17 October opening of the company’s first recycling facility, which can handle 20,000 tonnes of PVC annually.

Debusschere also says his company’s new windows and doors are nearly entirely recyclable.

The European PVC industry agreed at Rio to reduce its resource footprint by reclaiming 800,000 tonnes of PVC per year by 2020 – compared to the 255,000 the industry achieved in 2010. The VinylPlus project also commits the industry to phase out the use of lead by 2015, and to establish an industry label certifying PVC products as sustainable.

The recycling effort has been built from the bottom up over the past decade because PVC has a long life and has only been on the market since the 1950s.

The Rio disappointment

Other industries similarly made voluntary commitments amid criticism that Rio+20’s ‘The Future We Want’ roadmap contained few of the binding targets and commitments that European officials and ecology activists had hoped for.

Billed as the largest-ever UN conference, Rio+20 took place two decades after the first post-Cold War Earth Summit. Like green campaigners, some of the world’s leading trade groups and companies had hoped the conference would set the stage for clear targets on sustainable energy and development.

“We are very concerned about the lack of ambition and the lack of drive here amongst the international community to make the change,” said Peter Paul Van De Wijs, who was managing director of the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) when the conference opened on 20 June.

“There’s too much political positioning



Deceuninck Nu’s Belgian recycling plant turns old windows and doors into new products.

in these discussions rather than taking a broader society view and to take responsibly,” said Van De Wijs, who formerly headed Dow Chemical’s water global water strategy team. “That’s why it’s quite unique that businesses here are calling directly for more targets, more action and smarter regulation.”

Some activists doubted that corporate bosses were serious and saw big businesses’ promoting voluntary commitments to discourage politicians from taking regulatory action. The Corporate Europe Observatory, a Brussels group that monitors lobbying in the EU, accused businesses of a “lobbying offensive” at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit and “greenwashing” Rio.

Turning talk into action

But some industries say there’s action behind their talk. At Rio, some 24 multinational firms committed to ramp

up ecosystem protections and corporate sustainability reporting in the absence of international standards.

And in the Flemish town of Diksmuide, Deceuninck executives say they are building sustainability into their business practices. The company sees a health market in recycling as PVC windows and doors first installed 40 and 50 years ago are being replaced with more efficient models.

Scrap is a cheap resource, they say, and recycling is less energy-intensive than producing goods from virgin material. The company’s recycling plant converts old plastics into granular PVC that is then used to produce new products - including the honeycomb-like sound-buffering panels found along Europe’s highways and railway lines.

Deceuninck’s chief executive called it the company’s “duty” to recycle. “We are convinced that this is the right thing to do, and that this €3-billion investment will be profitable within three years.”

Trust me, I'm a corporation: Can business drive green growth?

Nearly six months after the Rio+20 global environment summit, the jury is still out on whether greener growth can truly happen. In the absence of major commitments by participating countries, EU officials were left placing their hopes on voluntary agreements by industry sectors, including plastics and PVC. But can those deliver?

In the months leading to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, EU officials were promising to fight for binding commitments on green growth, resource conservation and global environmental governance despite the economic slump in most advanced countries.

"We cannot wait until the economic crisis is over before we tackle the resources, environmental and climate crises," Connie Hedegaard, the climate action commissioner, said.

Little of that happened and nearly six months later, the jury is still out on how whether the conference will lead to change in the absence of major commitments.

"Although many expected and wanted more from Rio, including myself, we did achieve some notable advances," Janez Potočnik, the EU environment commissioner, said recently.

Business groups and multinational corporations contend there were notable advances at Rio, including voluntary action for an economic re-boot towards more sustainable production, consumption and purchasing.

Linda J. Fisher, vice president and chief sustainability officer at the US

chemical company DuPont, recently said that "sustainability has become a market-driven business priority throughout our value chains."

Since Rio, the multinational chemicals, food and energy companies have added an energy conservation initiative to its other sustainability targets, Fisher said in a statement marking the company's 20th year of corporate reporting on sustainability.

Dozens of corporations pledged in Brazil to become more planet-friendly and transparent in their reporting on sustainability measures.

For example, Europe's vinyl industry, for its part, agreed to a replace lead additives, cut energy use and boost the recycling of polyvinyl chloride plastics (PVC) that are commonly used in urban water pipes as well as household plumbing, windows and doors.

Still others, like DuPont, bulked up targets they had already set.

'It's not 1992 any more'

Some corporations and businesses groups – primarily from Europe – pressed for more action at Rio. The World Business Council on Sustainable Development and its Rio partner Business Action for Sustainable Development also called for government leaders to set global development targets in part to level the regulatory playing field between companies in advanced and emerging countries.

The World Economic Forum – representing 1,000 of the world's biggest companies – urged government leaders to develop "ambitious, universal and equitable goals for sustainable development" and to vest more in public-private solutions to development and ecological challenges.

Dominic Waughray, senior director of environmental initiatives at the World Economic Forum, acknowledged that Rio 2012 was not like Rio 1992, when in the spirit of post-Cold War internationalism the conference declaration, or Agenda 21, outlined plans for eradicating poverty and improving the environment.

But Waughray says this year's outcome

was not necessarily a setback. The world is no longer dominated by the victors of the Cold War, with emerging countries – including host Brazil – playing a lead role at last June's conference in defending their own interests.

"Rather than the usual perspective that Rio was somehow a failure, or didn't work or was a disappointment, I think that most people were not surprised that it was difficult for the intergovernmental process to come up with a coherent new agenda for sustainability given the multiple governmental demands now in the international space," Waughray told EurActiv. "It's not 1992 any more."

Another change was the role civil society and businesses played in shaping the outcome document, 'The Future we Want', and in launching voluntary action.

In the past, that level of involvement was unknown – reserved for government negotiators, Waughray said. "You weren't necessarily part of the DNA of the solution set ... Here we saw that kind of tilt and a dawning realisation of the multidimensional world that we live in and that these types of partnerships can really get things done."

Absent from Rio: Government action

Yet some campaign groups that had hoped for much more out of the Rio conference say that corporate initiatives and voluntary actions can never replace government oversight and regulation.

Olivier Hoedeman, campaign coordinator for the Corporate Europe Observatory, sees a growing shift to voluntary commitments in environmental matters, "and that means there is an essential factor that's being left out – and that's simply that of government action."

"It's a standard industry strategy to propose voluntary agreements to avoid regulation," Hoedeman told EurActiv. "We've seen in with cars and CO₂ emissions in the EU, where the

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Commission in the '90s agreed to a voluntary plan of action by the car industry and then later had to conclude that it was not delivering and something else was needed.

"In the meantime you've lost five to 10 years and that's the general problem if there is a non-realistic set of expectations."

Waghray of the World Economic Forum, however, says the Rio partnerships were not just corporations but involved

civil organisations and environmental groups. He also says they put pressure on government leaders to be more ambitious than they were at the Rio gathering, which prominent leaders like Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and David Cameron skipped altogether.

"The desire and demand from leading corporations to suggest that we need these sorts of things is hugely important because it creates a sense of urgency and crispness for the decision-makers," he said.

The next couple of years, with the poverty-fighting Millennium Development Goals due to expire in 2015, offer an important time for work on developing targets, Waghray said.

"If we have this conservation in 2015 and you asked the same questions," Waghray said, "I would say that yes I would be disappointed if we hadn't managed to craft something by then."

Firms tap technology to improve water delivery

Bulgaria loses as much as half its urban water supply through leaks, and across the European Union, some as much as 40% of piped water never makes it to consumers. But emerging technology could help reduce waste and turn water systems into energy sources.

The push for innovation and public-private partnerships comes amid growing pressure to conserve freshwater resources and improve irrigation efficiency as outlined in the European Commission's Water Blueprint last month. The document also calls for 'innovation partnerships' to achieve efficiency.

One example of such a partnership is Hidromod, a small Portuguese software firm that has jointed the global engineering company Bentley Systems to develop Aquasafe. The software and technology platform provides real-time information for water and wastewater plants to help detect leaks and improve planning during periods of high demand.



Lisbon with a view of the river Tejo. © Turismo de Lisboa

Slavco Velickov, water industry director for Bentley Systems Europe, said the platform helps "take dull infrastructure and make them data carriers so we move towards smarter water networks."

The system uses sensors and monitors connected to water plants and pipelines. Already in use in Portugal and Brazil, Aquasafe has attracted interest in thirsty urban areas in the Middle East.

Greater precision saves energy, wear and tear on equipment, and reduces waste, Velickov said at the European Forum on Eco-innovation, a European Commission event held in Lisbon on 26-27 November.

Adélio Silva, the manager of Hidromod, said Aquasafe helps water and wastewater systems "anticipate problems and to focus on prevention rather than reaction." Aquasafe was launched in 2011.

Leaky Europe

Though these and other monitoring technologies are not unique, industry officials say they are still relatively uncommon in water and wastewater treatment systems, especially in cities with ageing metal or, in some older areas, wooden pipes or ill-maintained infrastructure. Today, durable polyvinyl chloride pipes are seen as more efficient because they are less subject to corrosion.

The European Environment Agency, in a report released in November, said urban water delivery in the EU varies considerably with loss rates of between 20% and more than 40%.

The highest losses are typically in more

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disadvantaged EU states, such as Bulgaria, where half the urban water supply is lost through leakage, EEA figures show. But even in more prosperous countries, waste is common. Some 30% of piped water is lost in France and Italy is 30%, while in Denmark and Germany the leakage rate is less than 10%.

The European Commission last week recognized six companies in Austria, Germany, Britain and Italy for their efforts to improve public water management. The awards included operations that provide more efficient water delivery and wastewater handling.

In another drive for innovation, a Portuguese company is using the pressure in urban water pipes to generate electricity.

Power from water pipes

Engineers at Spheraa, a small firm in Lisbon, developed TERESA – the Portuguese acronym for renewable energy

turbine in the water supply system – using micro-turbines to produce electricity fitted into water pipes.

Similar technology is being used elsewhere. In the United States, the small Colorado city of Boulder generates electricity using turbines using turbines driven by the public water supply and uses the revenue it generates from selling to the local power company to help pay for water system improvements.

Spheraa's chief sees the system as a win-win situation for water utilities. Besides generating electricity, the turbines can reduce excess pressure in water pipes, pressure that over the long term can cause damage and leakage.

Though relatively simple in concept, the technology posed challenges.

"The basic principle behind it is similar to a water dam, but the operation is very different from a water dam because the Number One priority is water supply, it's not energy production," João Alves Pereira, Spheraa's chief executive, said in an

interview. "So we had to adapt our turbine for those conditions."

The electricity package plants are small (7 x 5 metres) with 85 kilowatts of rated power. In the Portuguese city of Alveiro, the project produces enough energy each day for about 150 homes in a city of some 80,000 people. "If you compare it to a normal water dam it is small, but if you think about it, it's a really big potential that you've wasted every day," Pereira said.

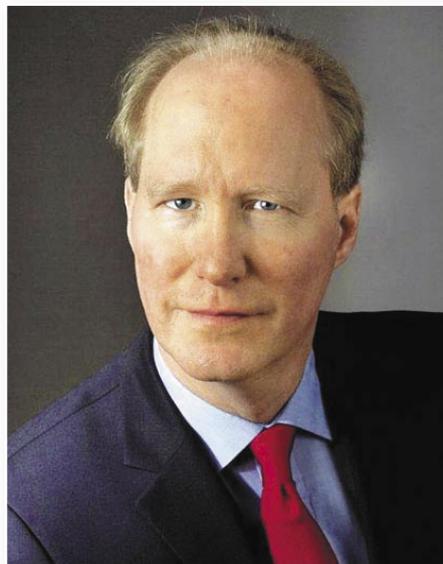
The turbines are housed in a bypass pipe and can be turned off at any time without affecting regular water flow. The power plants produce 100 kilowatts to 150 kilowatts at a cost of up to €300,000, Pereira said.

Spheraa's chief stressed that safety is a priority. "Every project that we [do], first we have to agree that the water quality will not be affected and also the water volume, meaning that we have to adapt to the site conditions and not the other way around."

Industry chief: 'In the long run, there is no alternative to bioplastics'

When fossil resources will have practically all been depleted, there will simply be no alternative to bioplastics, argues Hasso von Pogrell. But at the moment, they remain a niche market, despite the rapid increase in production of plant-based bottles.

Hasso von Pogrell is managing director at European Bioplastics, the association representing the interests of Europe's fast-



growing bioplastics' industry. He spoke to EurActiv's editor Frédéric Simon. Click here to read a related news article.

How widely are bioplastics being used currently in Europe? Are we talking still about a niche market?

Compared to the total plastics market,

it is of course still a rather niche market, but it is indeed a fast-growing market.

Just recently, we published some new data on global production capacities, and there you can see that by 2016, our forecast goes to almost 6 million tonnes, far larger than what it is today with a little over 1 million tonnes.

How does that compare with total production of plastics?

The total plastics production is around 260 million tonnes. That means that today, we make up for even less than half of a percent. According to our forecast, in about 5 years, we could break the 2% margin.

What are the industry's objectives for the future in terms of production and market share?

Needless to say, the objective of our

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industry is to grow and get as large a share of the market as possible.

I think what is very important is to get the big brand owners and retailers to switch over to bioplastics. They need to be convinced of the benefits when it comes to environmental issues from using different sorts of bioplastics. And this of course would be a big boost to help us grow even faster.

Your organisation mentions several markets where bioplastics are already in use, such as packing, electronics, and automotive industry. Are there any of those markets where bioplastics could represent 100% of production?

Well, today, from a technical point of view, we could already substitute almost 90% of the entire plastics market, but, of course, we don't have the capacities for that yet.

One very strongly growing market is the packaging sector. There, we expect that by 2016, 80% of the bioplastics production capacities will be met by bio-based PET which is used in bottles and rigid packaging. So that's definitely the largest market.

How can the industry meet that expected surge in demand? Part of it can be met with recycled bioplastics but I guess production will also have to come from agriculture...

Certainly. On the other hand, according to recent figures calculated by the University of Hannover, the total amount of arable land needed to cover the production of bioplastics today, is less than 0.02 %.

In 5 years time, should the forecast of a fivefold increase of bioplastics production capacities actually prove true, the acreage needed would still not exceed 0.06 %. And that does not even take into consideration that a lot of R&D is being done to work with, e.g., crop residuals, cellulose and waste as feedstock.

Do you expect this to have an impact on food prices or land use?

There is of course a correlation, the more bioplastics you use, the more crops you will need to grow at the end of the day to make them.

But the same calculations I mentioned before show that even if the entire plastics market was to switch to bioplastics, only 5% of arable land would be needed to meet that demand, on a global level.

Five percent of arable land seems relatively significant at global level. Don't you fear that this could put the industry in the spotlight for its environmental impact or influence on food prices?

This estimation applies only if we switch the entire production to crop-based bioplastics. And, as I said before, we expect a market of 6 million tonnes five years from now compared to a market of over 260 million tonnes for the entire plastics production.

So, we both probably won't live to see the day when bio-based plastics cover the entire market needs.

But, even if it were the case, the extra acreage needed in theory could be easily over-compensated if the amount of food wasted in Europe (around 25%) would be drastically reduced and the potential for increasing the crop yields per hectare in Eastern Europe would be adapted to that in Western European countries. Today, the ratio is somewhere between 30% and 70%.

Could bioplastics replace oil-based plastics completely in the future?

That depends on how you define future. In the long run, when fossil resources will practically all have been depleted, the answer is yes simply for the reason that there is no alternative.

Unlike in the energy sector, where, apart from biomass, you have different

options to substitute fossil resources for the production of energy – like water, wind and sun – plastics can divert to biomass only.

But, please, don't nail me down on as to what that could mean in years. I don't see it happening very quickly, it will take a lot of time and there are a lot of industries in the conventional plastics manufacturing which are not going to give up without a fight.

What are the drivers for growth in bioplastics? Does regulation play a role?

The main driver is, of course, the growing demand for more sustainably developed consumer products. Brandowners and OEMs [original equipment manufacturers] are looking for ways to reduce their environmental footprint and replace limited fossil-based materials with renewable, bio-based solutions. More and more companies therefore integrate bioplastics into their corporate sustainability programmes.

To answer your question, regulation and a supportive policy framework are always important to help innovations take up momentum during their market introduction phase.

But currently, unlike in the case of biofuels, Europe has no supportive mechanisms for bioplastics in place. So we might not get as much help as we would like but it's not stopping us.

Regulation might not be stopping you but is it helping you at all?

It is encouraging but not really in a way that can be felt distinctively. The whole issue about the bio-economy and resource efficiency is going into the right direction, but today, most of the real help comes from funding for the research and development, where quite a lot is already happening on that front.

What we would need is more help when it comes to the transition from laboratory scale to pilot plants then one step higher to industrial-scale production.

Plastic pipe industry chief: Banking on a greener future

Growing market requirements for 'green procurement' is driving sustainability, but the success of voluntary corporate sustainability initiatives depends on the attitude and enthusiasm of businesses to live up to higher standards, says Tony Calton.



Tony Calton became general manager of the European Plastic Pipes and Fittings Association (TEPPFA) in April. A civil engineer, he previously worked in the United Kingdom for the Brussels-based Aliaxis Group. He responded in writing to questions from EurActiv's Timothy Spence.

The Rio+20 conference a year ago in June saw the launch of a number of

corporate environmental sustainability initiatives. The PVC industry has also pledged to improve its own environmental performance through what you call the VinylPlus. What does this involve?

The European PVC plastic pipes industry already absorbs around 50,000 tonnes of recycle each year as a result of previous voluntary commitments. The overall VinylPlus initiative is building on this success with an ambitious target to increase annual consumption of recycle to 800,000 tonnes. In fact the plastic pipes industry has made a pledge to use 100% of the rigid PVC pipes recycle available. In addition to this rigid PVC recycle from other sources, such as profiles, is also being used.

Other successes under the VinylPlus commitment achieved by the pipes industry on the basis of voluntary commitments include the replacement of lead-based stabilisers with alternative substances.

VinylPlus represents voluntary commitments. How effective can these be if they are not backed by regulations that are not enforceable?

The effectiveness of such voluntary schemes partly relies on the attitude and enthusiasm of the industry sector involved. Clearly, as in this case, it helps if there is good alignment with their overall Corporate Social Responsibility declarations. However, fundamental to the success of such schemes is a commitment by all stakeholders and the complete supply chain to embrace the initiative and be fully supportive of the benefits it can provide to the whole industry. The ever-increasing market requirements for "green procurement" in both the public and private sectors have also contributed to the success of this initiative.

Ultimately, if backed by legislation, non-participating manufacturers would be realigned and a level playing field

would be re-established.

Not all producers agree to live by the voluntary standards you are talking about. Can you compete successfully if you are operating at a higher – and presumably more costly – level than companies that are not bound by the same standards?

All TEPPFA members have committed to participating in the VinylPlus scheme with the technical and financial implications this entails. Clearly there are companies outside of TEPPFA who have chosen not to sign up to the scheme and obviously do not have the same obligations until imposed by legislation. However, the market is also being increasingly influenced by requirements for "green public procurement" which should not be underestimated as an incentive for manufacturers to be active in this area.

The members of TEPPFA have always taken an extremely responsible approach to maintaining the balance between the reliability of their products and the ever-increasing environmental pressures to improve the level of recycling and achieve ultimate resource efficiency. They are committed to continuing to comply with all the relevant European and National Standards and not compromising on product performance in their efforts to increase the use of recycle.

It must be recognised by all stakeholders and policymakers that there is further work to be done in terms of adapting product standards and other areas of EU regulation, such as REACH [the chemicals directive], to allow the increased use of recycle. The members of TEPPFA are committed to working with the commission and the relevant authorities in member states to achieve this evolution whilst also ensuring it does not compromise on the fitness for purpose of their products.

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Despite all the talk about sustainability and resource efficiency, on average 40% of piped water in the EU is lost before it gets to consumers. What should be done to change this?

Good progress has been made over the last few years in terms of addressing this issue through the rehabilitation of water distribution networks. This can easily be demonstrated by the increased activities of TEPPFA members involved in the supply of pipes for water mains.

It is now widely recognized that plastic pipe systems for water supply systems offer long-term durability and integrity which will help to ensure that these replacement systems will secure our water supply in the future.

The importance of reducing leakage in sewer networks should also be acknowledged in this context as clearly this will help to prevent pollution of the aquifer which is often a vital source of drinking water.

Greater recognition is required of the part that water network rehabilitation can play in reducing water consumption. Increased investment in this area could be more effective than some ongoing initiatives designed to reduce the level of non-potable applications where drinking water is currently used.

Representatives of your industry have complained that the EU's chemicals directive – REACH – could hurt your efforts to create a circular economy for pipes and other PVC products. How so?

The issue of re-using end of life product (including legacy substances), often manufactured many decades ago, that contain additives which are now, or will in the future be covered by REACH needs to be carefully addressed to avoid a situation where such material cannot be cost effectively recycled.

It is important to note that such material can be incorporated into

pipes without any additional risk to health or the environment and without compromising on product performance.

What would you do differently if you could advise the EU regulators and policymakers?

We would quite simply ask that the EU regulators and policymakers provide every opportunity for representative industry bodies such as TEPPFA to be actively involved in the development of pragmatic solutions for resolving the issues of legacy substances under REACH and most importantly they recognize the relevance and importance this now has to the success of other EU initiatives to reduce landfill and further encourage recycling.

We consider that there is a compelling case to allow the controlled use of legacy substances in recycle for products such as pipes that do not pose a risk to consumers or the environment.

PVC has been around for more than 50 years now and is probably best known in water pipes and plumbing. In the early years there were health concerns raised by the lead that the industry used as a stabiliser. Today, are you confident that your products are safe for consumers?

PVC pipes and fittings are now used for numerous product application areas and, in fact, they are the default material for many of these.

The industry has invested heavily in recent years to move away from lead-based stabilisers. However, it must be stressed that these products do not pose a risk to health and, as stated above, in order to ensure that we increase the use of recycled materials and not consign this valuable resource to landfill it is important that any myths are dispelled. This will allow us to move forward with improving our environment by embracing the opportunity to recycle this material in products which will serve the community for many decades to come.

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