

Congress sees focus on health and safety, expanding markets

Record numbers at UTECH

By Liz White, UT staff

MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS—The last 20 years “have been an extraordinary period of growth” bringing “opportunities and challenges for chemicals, and for polyurethanes,” said Nick Webster, president of ISOPA (the European isocyanates and polyols association) opening the plenary session at UTECH EUROPE 2006.

Pointing out that this year is “a very special one ... the 20th anniversary of the UTECH conference and exhibition,” Webster highlighted dramatic changes since the 1980s, including the advent of the internet and oil at \$50 a barrel.

Among these are the former communist countries in central and eastern Europe, moving to a free market system, while communist China and protectionist India have embraced open capitalism, he said.

Webster, who is European polyurethane vice president for Huntsman, listed these aspects as potential opportunities.

But he pointed to growing public concern with environmental, health and safety issues, and with sustainability as “definite challenges for us and our desire for our industry to grow.”

UTECH in 1986 had only one paper on ES&H matters, Webster said. “Then came the Montreal Protocol, Kyoto and most recently REACH (Regulation, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals), and our world has changed.”

In “20 years of extraordinary change for our PU industry,” it has successfully met many challenges, including phase-out of chlorofluorocarbon blowing agents, and is now coming together to tackle REACH, said Webster.

REACH, likely to come into force in the EU in 2007, affects everyone in the polyurethanes value chain including downstream applications. “If you are not registered, you will not be able to sell,” Webster emphasised.

ISOPA is already “actively working on polyols to ensure we have the data for all our major products,” and is working with flexible foam group Europur and moulders association Euromoulders to be ready for toluene diisocyanate (TDI),

Webster added.

ISOPA focussed on its Walk the Talk’ Europe-wide initiative on safe handling of chemicals in the polyurethane sector at UTECH (see more in the next issue).

Visitors up by 14 percent

UTECH EUROPE 2006 broke previous attendance records, as well as attracting over 150 exhibiting companies.

A total of 3026 people registered for the exhibition, as well as 519 delegates for the parallel UTECH conference.

Some 40 percent of visitors attended for more than two days, an indication of the importance of the event as a place to do business, said Tony Kenter of IPI BV and Paul Mitchell, managing director of Crain Communication Ltd, joint organisers of the event.

Attendance was 14 percent higher than at UTECH EUROPE 2003 in The Hague. Many more visitors came from eastern Europe, including the Russian Federation, Turkey and Asia. **UT**



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REACH affects all, said Webster