



Comment

May 2013 deadline looms for chemical registration in Europe

Another significant deadline for Europe's regulations concerning registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction of chemicals (REACH) is rapidly approaching and, warns Malcolm Carroll, this one will affect many smaller companies in the polymer-related industries who need to start preparing now.

At the European Commission's (EC's) conference on the registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction of chemicals (REACH) in September 2011, the Helsinki, Finland-based European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) launched a campaign – REACH 2013 – Act Now! – to urge manufacturers, importers and others in the supply chain to start preparing for the next registration deadline for the European Union's (EU's) REACH regulations: 31 May 2013.

In 2011, manufacturers, importers and distributors of chemicals above a threshold volume (1 kt a year) were required to register their chemicals with ECHA. In 2013, companies will be required to register all phase-in substances that are manufactured in, or imported to, the EU above a volume of 100 t a year.

There has been much discussion and often the need for clarification of how REACH will impact on companies in the polymer-related industries. Although polymers are apparently exempt from the actual registration process, their constituent monomers may not be. Therefore, EU manufacturers and importers need to ensure that they remain aware of the guidelines at all times and they know as soon as monomers become subject to REACH.

Monomers are by definition an intermediate; however, they cannot be registered under REACH via the provisions that would normally apply to intermediates. Manufacturers and importers must register them as part of their normal obligations, and they are then generally to be treated in the same way as any other substance in terms of evaluation, restriction and the provision of information in the supply chain.

One of the major considerations of REACH is the need to produce Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and to supply these to customers; polymers also are subject to this requirement. In fact, the industry must still evaluate the hazardous proper-

ties of the polymer, and the findings of the evaluation of the monomers must be contained and communicated to the customers in the actual polymer SDS. Consequently, although polymers are superficially exempt, the industry still has obligations and responsibilities under this legislation.

With an annual value of €250 billion and applications in a vast number of industries, the polymer industry is one of the most important sectors to the economy of the EU. The sector is dominated by small and medium enterprises (SMEs), whose businesses are already under increasing threat from competitors in low-wage economies, increased European legislation, and rises in the prices of energy and raw materials. Most of these smaller companies will find it challenging to achieve compliance: they will not have any experience of the REACH process; they are likely to have budget constraints and few resources in place to handle the complexities and administrative challenges involved.

However, to ease some of the pressures involved in REACH registration, such companies could start taking action now.



One immediate thing to consider is the impact of significant changes to the requirements for sending SDSs and associated documents to customers.

The purpose of REACH is to make the use and handling of chemicals safer, which is why one of its key requirements is that the SDSs are used consistently by everyone who comes into contact with the substances. Under REACH, manufacturers, importers and distributors of chemicals now need to ensure the direct delivery of SDS and associated documentation to customers. The companies are also responsible for keeping SDSs and their customers up to date with respect to any changes or clarifications.

For many companies, these new requirements will be an administrative and a logistical challenge, as well as a costly exercise. Traditional methods of sending SDSs by email or post may not be considered robust enough to stand up to regulatory scrutiny.

One solution is to automate the process using an industry-wide delivery service called REACH Delivery. This secure online service enables the electronic delivery, receipt, control, update, audit and tracking of the SDS, in compliance with REACH. It automatically monitors, tracks and reports on all documents that are sent to customers, as well as providing a delivery status for auditing. If there are any changes or clarifications to SDSs, the new versions are sent to customers and replace the previous ones automatically. Organizations no longer have to worry about out-of-date versions being in circulation, and managers can be confident all employees are using the most up-to-date SDSs at all times.

The system stores all documents in an electronic database, allowing users a single consistent point of access for the latest versions, and is designed to be simple to access and operate. Moreover, REACH Delivery offers a free account for low-volume users, who can upgrade to the paid service when their volumes increase. The multi-lingual service allows companies, no matter where they are located, to manage and automate the sending and receiving of SDS, other documents and messages within a fully secure and audited environment.

As no one can export to the EU without complying, REACH already affects companies throughout the world. Further, similar legislation is now being considered in other countries, most significantly in the USA. Consequently, REACH Delivery has been designed to meet the requirements of international users: Non-EU firms can use it to



From May 2013, Europe's regulations on the safe use and handling of chemicals (REACH) will have extended to affect many smaller companies in the polymer-related industries. Those that will be included should act immediately, says author Malcolm Carroll.

comply with REACH by securely delivering SDSs to their customers in Europe; they can also use it outside of Europe, as it supports the delivery and receipt of SDSs and any other documents worldwide; they can use it to distribute SDSs throughout their own company.

There is no doubt that compliance with REACH is a complicated issue for companies in the polymer-related industries. The 2013 registration deadline is now only just over a year away, so companies need to start preparing now. By tackling some of the requirements of REACH ahead of time, such as by automating their delivery of SDSs, companies will free time to focus on other important issues related to their obligations.



Further information

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