

GPCA Plastics Summit: Industry Expansion Creates a New Set of Challenges

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The burgeoning plastics industry in the Mideast's Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region faces its own set of challenges, speakers and delegates at the first annual Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Plastics Summit, currently taking place in Dubai, say. The image of plastics in the Gulf is much more favorable than in the West, studies by GPCA show. However, a nascent anti-plastics campaign in the region could threaten prospects.

"Growth opportunities are abundant based on the benefits of plastics and the resources we have in the region. It would be good to unite the complete industry, so we are inviting converters to join GPCA in order to address issues. We need to work jointly on innovations, products, and applications. We also need to innovate in our supply chain and tackle the question of plastics after use," says Jacobus (Koos) Van Haasteren, executive v.p./performance chemicals at Sabic. "The converters are also telling us that we as suppliers, need to develop a more service-oriented attitude. We need to listen to those voices and act on it."

The second day of the forum was devoted to sustainability. Novomer (Boston) CEO Jim Mahoney detailed his company's novel technologies, which use carbon dioxide (CO₂) and carbon monoxide feedstock to produce high-performance plastics and coatings, and value-added chemicals. The company has been issued with 10 patents and has concluded a joint venture with DSM to produce coatings. It also has an alliance with Kodak and will announce a collaboration with another company within two weeks, Mahoney says.

"In Europe we are addressing an industry with sales of €300 billion (\$370 million), employing 1.6 million people, and encompassing 50,000 companies involved in the plastics value chain, but there is a wrong perception about plastics," Wilfried Haensel, executive director at Plastics Europe (Brussels) told delegates. "If all of the houses in Europe were insulated with plastics materials, we could save an additional 350 million m.t./year of CO₂." He also stresses the other energy-saving aspects of plastics used in cars and packaging.

Hugo Verlomme, author of *The Plastic Bag War*, is an environmentalist and oceanographer passionately opposed to biodegradable plastic bags that at one stage were mandatory in French supermarkets. He told delegates that the use of corn as feedstock and of associated agchems is not sustainable, but that "this world could not exist without plastics." All leisure activities associated with the sea require plastics of varying sophistication, he says.

Recycling was discussed in detail at the Plastics Summit and speakers called for more initiatives covering collection and recycling in GCC countries since there is virtually no effort at present. However, "we truly believe that the recycling business in the region can be profitable," says Laurence Jones, v.p./corporate support at Borouge.

Borouge has launched a recycling initiative through Abu Dhabi National Oil Co.'s gasoline stations in Abu Dhabi, in collaboration with a local recycling company. Meanwhile, an education and awareness campaign, Plastic Fantastic, was launched in Kuwait. The campaign aims to show the value of plastics and emphasize that they should not be wasted. Many regional producers have installed clean-up programs in their countries, Muayad Al-Faresi, regional sales manager at Equate (Kuwait City), says. Radhiya Al Hashimi, executive committee member at the Emirates environmental group, welcomed the discussion and said her organization would be glad to work with GPCA to highlight key recycling issues related to plastics.