# Discussion Group: future challenges for the acrylic industry

HELSINKI 2024 - During the conference in Helsinki, Julien Renvoise from Trinseo led the discussion about the future challenges for the acrylic industry, which focused on sustainability. Several issues were discussed. If we want to move towards a circular economy, we need to work together and cooperate as member companies in a working committee focused on sustainability. We could define the role of distributors in a circular economy and work towards that. We need to have a louder voice and clarify our materials' sustainability goals. To the market as well as to European legislators. How can we communicate to legislators the impact of our materials and what reliable information and numbers are needed to ensure the regulation is implemented without impacting negatively your business? We heard Martin Walker say 80% less virgin plastics production by 2040. Meaning we need to start and come up with an action plan now.

To name a few topics that were discussed and could be addressed in a future working committee regarding sustainability:

- Which is better, and considering limited current recycled material capacities, to producing every material with some limited recycled content or, as now, target highest recycled content in sheets? Which contributes more to the circular economy? Which will help to accelerate the development of circular material?

- Big raw materials manufacturers have the knowledge of what the future will bring, what will be required and what to anticipate. Why are we not discussing the distributor's role in the circular market and what the manufacturer needs from a distributor in a circular market?

- Manufacturers need two things: more communication with the market and collecting more information from the market. Distributors in different countries know what is required in their country for the different branches (building, signing, construction) and should pass this information on to their manufacturers

- We should communicate numbers and facts (carbon footprint, LCA, recycled capacities, ...) to decisions makers further down the value chain like architects, designers, constructors, EPD and LCAs are being made already but lack harmonization; let's start with a framework for how we measure CO2 and get all people behind it. We need a general and aligned definition of LCA to compare apples to apples. Harmonisation in measurements is vital for our industry. ISO only asks you to do what you say, which is insufficient. Look at different measurements and decide as an industry to take that one as guidance.

- Different systems of depolymerization existing. Could create confusion if not explain well. What is the best? And can you compare? You may fall into the trap of complexity. Need for each player on the full value chain to be equipped enough to pass on the message further down. Give them information and tell them about the possibilities. Inform properly and comparably.

We need to work together, even between competitors – there is a time to compete and a time to collaborate for the greater good of this planet : Plaskolite, Trinseo, 3A. Associations and consortiums are created for that. We should adapt to the same language. Sustainability is a broad and complex concept, and we should understand and speak the same language.

Fluoropolymers Product Group has arranged to show they are not dangerous, but why were they in that position in the first place? It will happen with acrylic or other materials. A common approach needs to be taken, but how do we harmonise between all the partners?

Example given : Polystyrene had a negative perception. Trinseo was important to change these perceptions. Speaking to brand owners, to the whole chain (institutions, NGOs, recyclers, eco-organisms,...). We were educating ourselves at the same time, learning more about the complex recycling world, and were happy with the result and progress after 5 years. But one needs to take a bold step, have a group of people ready to take the challenge and its destiny at hands, and start seriously. Of course, you have competitors, but you cannot walk this road alone.

The real influencers in a circular economy are the brand owners. Retailers all talk about it, but it stops if you confront them about how we get material back from them. We need regulations that incentivize this take back (or manage their waste and ideally in a close loop system).

Education: If we don't come to a joint proposition or aligned interpretation of data, we will get caught up in the rush of daily business. Now, what can we do as distributors? We can do a little in terms of deciding what to do at the beginning of the chain. Distributors can now only give their own interpretation of the product they are selling. We don't want to be seen as a group moving in different directions and unreliable.

Pricing: The more we inform the customer, the more they are comfortable to push further down the value chain, embark on the sustainability journey and willing to pay. any customer wants to buy a more responsible product. This will be definitively an ask from the younger generation, who wants to make a contribution and take responsibility.

**Conclusion: We will discuss this with the board and survey whether there are people in the association willing to work together in a committee and follow up on this idea.**