

Activities of JAPIA

No.19 Production & Environment Subcommittee, Industrial Chemicals Working Subcommittee

Report: Production & Environment Subcommittee, Industrial Chemicals Working Subcommittee

Collecting and disseminating information on environmental regulations for chemical substances

Supporting member companies operating globally

The importance of chemical management in manufacturing is increasing year by year. To ensure the safety of every individual working in the automobile industry and to preserve the global environment, it is essential to properly handle not only the raw materials used in automobile parts but also the various materials used and generated during the production process. In this context, JAPIA has been promoting research on laws and regulations in various countries, disseminating information, and supporting the establishment of management systems through its Industrial Chemical Working Subcommittee, which was established within Production Environment Committee. This article introduces the efforts of the working subcommittee, composed of 10 member companies, including its history, the “behind-the-scenes” activities that have been instrumental in its success, and the thoughts of its members.

Working Subcommittee established with a view to harmonization with laws and regulations of various countries

The United Nations adopted the “Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)” in 2006 as a guideline to protect human health and the global environment from the adverse effects of chemicals. In the same year, the European Union (EU) also implemented “the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS)” and established “REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals)”, marking significant progress in international environmental regulations.

Amid a global trend in which the entire industry is required to take responsibility for safety from upstream to downstream in the supply chain, JAPIA, which is composed of member companies operating globally, also discussed how to respond. In 2011, a precursor to the working subcommittee, “Chemical Substance Regulation Response Working Group (WG)”, was

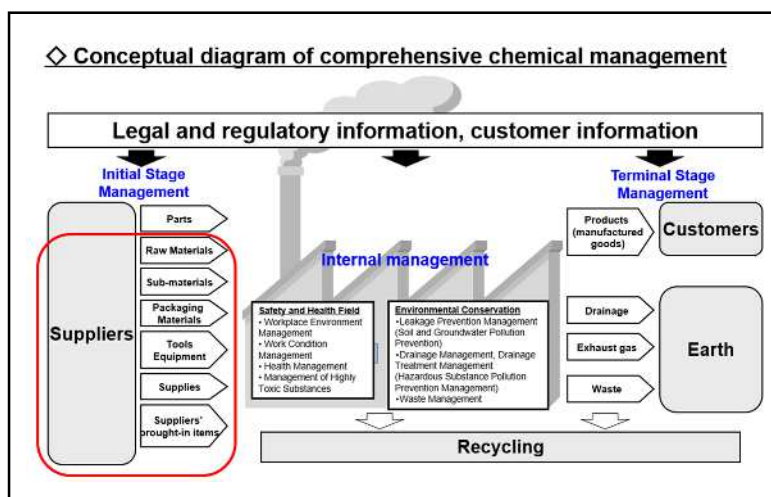
established. This was the year before the Japanese government formulated its “SAICM Domestic Implementation Plan.”

Makoto Koyama, Leader of the Initial Stage Management Group (DENSO CORPORATION), looks back on the establishment of the WG and says, “With Europe and the US taking the lead in SAICM and progress expected in China and Southeast Asia, it was essential to take action in order to operate globally.” On the other hand, even among the founding members, understanding of the system varied widely. “Initially, we were focused solely on domestic regulations. It took about five years to study the regulations of countries like Europe, the US, and China, and only then did the members' awareness begin to shift toward a global perspective,” he added.

As the team progressed, awareness of the importance of chemical management grew, and the team was promoted from a working group to a working subcommittee.

Chemical management starts at the first stage to the production process

The working subcommittee places particular emphasis on thorough chemical management starting from the procurement stage, which is the “Initial Stage” of the production process. Mr. Koyama states, “Each company has been managing the products it delivers to its customers thoroughly,” but adds, “Various substances are discharged and discarded throughout the factory. In order to manage this, it is essential to understand what substances are coming in and in what quantities.”



In general, when purchasing for manufacturing, various items are brought in, including parts and raw materials, as well as items that make up the final delivered product, such as auxiliary materials, packaging materials, jigs and tools,

equipment, and supplies. Chemical management begins with thoroughly identifying all of these substances, including their locations and quantities, in accordance with the laws and regulations of each country.

However, in order to ensure appropriate management at the initial stage, it is essential to seek a thorough understanding from suppliers and other parties. Under these circumstances, in 2014, the working subcommittee compiled “Case Studies of Chemical Management in Green Procurement Guidelines” and collected and shared actual case studies from each working subcommittee member company. Green procurement serves as a guideline for cooperating with and requesting suppliers to reduce their environmental impact, and there is a growing movement to establish guidelines across the manufacturing industry. The working subcommittee updates its materials as needed to support member companies in implementing appropriate chemical management from the procurement stage.

Effective use of information gathered through our own initiatives

In addition to summarizing and disseminating key points of management in the initial stage, it is also important to understand the laws and regulations of each country that affect the businesses of member companies. In 2013, the working subcommittee created “a list of laws and regulations related to chemical management in factories”. Currently, we are compiling a list of relevant laws and regulations in countries and regions where two or more member companies have expanded their operations.

This list, according to Leader of the Regulatory Research Group, Hitoshi Matsuzaki (Yazaki Corporation), was created “with no precedent and with all members working on their own initiative,” and is the result of painstaking and extensive information gathering. Every year, relevant laws and regulations are revised around the world, and simply confirming these changes is a considerable task. In addition, language barriers also pose an obstacle in some countries and regions.

Mr. Matsuzaki says, “In recent years, regulations have been established in emerging countries such as Southeast Asia, but these regions often have their own languages. Therefore, we cannot provide inappropriate information based on incorrect translations or interpretations”, and reveals the reality that it is difficult to specify the details of each regulation and amendment, also says, “We are always aware of the issue of whether this is sufficient.”

In this situation, in 2021, we took a step forward in further enhancing the information we provide by publishing a “List of Chemical Substance Regulations and Information System Access Points.” In this industry dominated by small and medium-sized companies, the amount of effort that individual companies can

devote to information gathering is limited. We hope that active use of this list will help reduce the workload as much as possible.

Working together to protect the future of the Earth

The working subcommittee is not only updating and expanding existing guidelines and lists of the latest regulations, but also emphasizing their practical application. To date, we have held seminars about twice a year, with “participants primarily consisting of practitioners, with around 200 attendees per seminar” (according to Yasuhiro Tsunokake, Leader of the Seminar Promotion Group), and the scope of initiatives is steadily expanding. Going forward, in addition to these initiatives, we aim to further strengthen outreach efforts by collecting and disseminating best practices, as well as developing training materials that can be effectively utilized on-site.

Mr. Koyama, Leader of the Initial Stage Management Group, says, “Chemical management within the workplace is an initiative for occupational safety and health and global environmental conservation. It is recognized as a task that should be done as a matter of course.” On the other hand, he also points out that “it is not easy for those in charge of practical operations to get their superiors and management to understand what specific measures are necessary.” In order to implement effective management, it is necessary to raise awareness among employees, but in some cases, it may also be necessary to review workplace operations and make appropriate capital investments. The working subcommittee aims to cooperate with other committees and subcommittees within JAPIA, as well as other organizations, to ensure that the significance of our efforts is understood not only by individual companies but also throughout the entire supply chain.

Shinsuke Sato (NOK CORPORATION), Executive Secretary of the working subcommittee says, “In a world where ‘it goes without saying’ that things should be done, chemical management is a task that someone must take the initiative to perform. Our team is committed to taking responsibility for the result, working for the sake of each and every person in the industry and for the global environment.” We are proud to look toward a future where we will continue to expand the number of like-minded individuals who share our commitment to this “behind-the-scenes” effort, contributing to the healthy development of the industry.