

# Mission Possible

For more information,  
check out  
[www.helsinkiicf.eu](http://www.helsinkiicf.eu)

**HELSINKI** proclaimed itself the chemicals capital of Europe at the first Helsinki Chemicals Forum held in May 2009.

This was with good reason, too: Finland's capital is also the location of the European Chemicals Agency,

ECHA. The agency's client base is formed by all manufacturers and importers of chemical products worldwide—essentially the majority of the

users, too—who operate in the chemicals business in the European Union area.

This is due to the EU's new chemicals legislation, Reach, and its official proceedings. The agency received more than two million pre-registrations, and the number of clients in the actual registration may be around one hundred thousand, many of whom are operators outside the EU.

No wonder Helsinki has already attracted experts, consultants and decision makers to hundreds of Reach meetings, and the level of activity can only increase in the future.

**EVEN** if the number of delegates did fall as a result of the economic recession, the extremely wide international representation came as a surprise at the first HCF. Around 200 inquisitive guests attended from 31 countries. The best—and most anxious—questions about the future of global chemicals policy came from outside Europe.

The inadequacy of worldwide discussion and interaction in the chemical industry along with the clear need to improve standardisation of legislation in the industry around the world emerged as the main findings of the forum. A good example is the way in which global harmonisation (GHS) of labelling of chemicals is already progressing.

The congress audience were of the opinion that even strict regional legislation, such as Reach, will not remove the risks relating to the use of chemicals. Instead, they may even create artificial barriers to world trade. Representatives of the developing countries perceived various risks from transferring the manufacturing of the most hazardous chemicals to these countries.

However, HCF 2009 was not a Reach seminar but a themed discussion platform where the subjects of competitiveness and innovation in the chemical industry, legislation, chemical safety and consumers were brought to the forefront.

The forum received good feedback from the delegates. They gave special thanks to the panel-based sessions and to the high-level key-note speakers who gave talks at lunch and dinner. Feedback showed that delegates regarded the congress as interesting and of high quality, and people hoped that it would be continued.

**THE GLOBAL** economic recession that started at the end of 2008 has turned out to be quite severe. It has struck industry and construction hard, and services have been similarly affected, albeit with a time lag. Businesses' financial results for 2009 will be more modest than usual, which will be seen everywhere, for instance as a cooling in investment.

The profitability of the chemical industry will be one of the main themes of HCF 2010 arranged for next May. The congress will include discussions on innovations and consumers, and in addition the role of chemistry in preventing climate change shall be highlighted.

Isn't it in the interests of businesses to improve global chemical legislation for competition-related reasons only? Can you imagine policymakers reducing the requirements of Reach or extending the time table? How can we ensure adequate investment in innovation in present circumstances? What would be the role of the EU and the member states? These questions shall also be raised in Helsinki from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010.

The next HCF will also cover regulation to a greater extent than before, particularly preparation for actual registration of chemicals and the running of SIEF forums. The congress also aspires to create a framework for interaction between legislators, operators, and customers on different continents.

The Helsinki Chemicals Forum 2010 programme is being planned in collaboration with ECHA and UNEP, amongst others. ECHA will organise its own stakeholder day as it did in connection with the previous event. Interest in this will be considerable when you remember the problem areas arising from the first phase of registrations of chemicals that is to be implemented next year.

The forum, for its part, will provide the opportunity to study areas in greater depth, and it will allow interaction between the authorities and industry. Good-quality networking ranked among the most positive outcomes of the first HCF, and this will continue next spring.

See you in Helsinki!

**Hannu Vornamo**

The author is the Secretary General of the Helsinki Chemicals Forum 2010.  
[hannu.vornamo@helsinkiicf.eu](mailto:hannu.vornamo@helsinkiicf.eu)

