

10 minutes with...Matt Ritter

By Stephen Harrison, published in gasworld magazine | 4 March 2019

Take 10 minutes out with Matt Ritter, Global Business Director of Fluorochemicals at Arkema, as he discusses safety, corporate sustainability and the big changes underway in the refrigerants business.

Ritter sheds particular light on the challenges arising as a result of this change, and how this is currently more evident in the European market than other regional markets.

Thanks for talking to gasworld today Matt. What have we interrupted in your schedule?

Well, we're actually experiencing a heavy fall of nature's own refrigerant – snow. So, I've just travelled home from the office to drive in safe conditions and make my home secure.

Clearly safety is a big topic for you. Is that also something you look for when identifying refrigerant gas distributors?

Absolutely. Their safety record and product stewardship programme will be number one and number two on the checklist. Then I'll be looking into their geographic coverage and cost base. We also consider who else they are partnering with to avoid channel conflicts.

With regard to product stewardship and corporate sustainability, what metrics does Arkema use to track performance?

We have several KPI's in that area. Of relevance to refrigerants, we measure our greenhouse gas emissions. That covers things from inadvertent refrigerant gas releases from our three main fluorocarbon production plants, to the energy usage from R-134a production and R&D sites worldwide. We also take product stewardship at our customers very seriously to help ensure we have no inadvertent fluorocarbon product releases. Our refrigerant recovery and recycling capability is also something that we are proud of.



Source: Arkema

What proportion of refrigerants are sold directly vs through your distributor network?

We tend to use distributors more when the market is fragmented and further from our power zones. In the US we do a lot direct. In Europe, it's the opposite – we work closely with distributors for most of our market access. Asia's a mixed bag.

What sets Arkema apart to make it attractive as a partner for refrigerants distributors?

We hope that partners appreciate our leading approach to corporate sustainability and our advocacy of the Kigali amendment. Beyond that, the breadth of our product portfolio across HCFC's, HFC's and HFO's is key. And we believe that our

global presence with production in Asia, Europe and the US is a differentiator. For example, with our plant in Kentucky, US, we are the only producer of R-32 in the western hemisphere.

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How is the Kigali amendment of the Montreal protocol impacting business?

The main impact is the very ambitious phasedown of HFC's in Europe. There are progressive quota reductions and outright bans of products that exceed certain global warming potential (GWP) levels.

How does that compare to other regions around the world?

Well, the programmes in Australia, Japan and Canada have been similar but the EU programme seems to be stressing the industry more. We have received reports of illegal product imports into Europe through, let's say, 'unconventional supply-chains'. Under these circumstances, the environmental and safety risks of uncontrolled product release are high. And the business of legitimate operators suffers through price erosion and volume loss.

Which applications do you see being the quickest to convert to new generation low GWP products?

Well, foam blowing agents should be the first to move because they are not contained in refrigeration circuits. Beyond that, R-448A and R-449A are making great in-roads into commercial refrigeration.

On the other side of the coin, which applications do you think will be the hardest to convert?

In Europe, the HVAC segment is moving rapidly in the conversion from R410A to lower GWP products like R-32 as codes are adjusted, but we have not yet seen that shift in the US as the codes and standards are much slower to allow a mildly flammable gas.

Specialty applications such as R-23 for low temperature bio-storage at -40°C and below will also be tough to convert. But, it's -30°C in some parts of the US just now – if that keeps on much longer, I guess that will resolve the issue of R-23 usage!

Matt, thanks for sharing your views and anecdotes with gasworld.

Thanks for the opportunity. It's been a pleasure.

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