

Safety Is a Mindset, not a Department

Creating a True Safety Culture that Avoids Injuries and Accidents

The Dutch holding Stahl, headquartered in Waalwijk, produces specialty chemicals for coatings, processing, and treatments in industries like mobility, fashion & footwear, architecture & construction, interior spaces and paint, ink & packaging. CHEManager asked Alexis Pey, Global SHE & Process Safety Manager at Stahl, on the company's mindset on safety, health and environment (SHE), the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and how the chemical engineering community can benefit from Stahl's expertise on SHE. Ralf Kempf asked the questions.

CHEManager: Mr. Pey, what is Stahl's mindset regarding process safety? Does the holding have specific activities or policies in place to ensure the health and safety of its employees and to prevent environmental damage?

Alexis Pey: Knowledge is the cornerstone of Stahl's mindset for process safety. A strong process safety culture derives from having a complete understanding of the properties and characteristics of the substances, facilities and processes present at our sites, which define the potential hazards we are managing.

For these reasons, we have policies in place that describe hazards and define the methodologies, criteria and tools to be applied globally so that we take a consistent approach to key process safety points.

As well, in order to foster this knowledge to deeper levels, we rely on training and sharing experiences

both internally and externally. For instance, we are active in several technical groups at international level and we are open to sharing this experience with other companies.

How did the coronavirus pandemic impact the SHE measures at Stahl?

A. Pey: Covid-19 represents a global health crisis, so Stahl has been impacted in the same way as many other industries in the chemical and other industrial sectors.

Our first reaction was to adopt measures to prevent people who could be carrying this disease from entering our sites. We did this by establishing criteria and denying access for people who had been in a so-called hot area in the previous 14 days. However, when this criterion was no longer feasible due to the spread of the virus at community level, we adopted measures to reduce

the number of people at our sites to just those who are exclusively linked with essential production processes. Finally, as the pandemic and the characteristics of this disease evolved, we defined further measures. These measures recognize that it is not feasible to reliably exclude people from our sites who have been inadvertently infected with the coronavirus. The aim, therefore, is to prevent the spread of the disease within our facilities.

In addition, besides our criteria, we always follow the recommendations of the health authorities and the legal or other requirements to cope with the Covid-19 in the countries in which we have facilities.

Another thing I want to make clear is that managing Covid-19 requires a coordinated effort with all other departments in the company. Viewing it



Alexis Pey, Global SHE & Process Safety Manager, Stahl

regard, I would like to mention two significant projects.

The first involved defining and implementing a new hazard identification and risk assessment methodology which is now used globally. This helps to share and compare facilities between different sites and, as said before, adds a solid process safety concept to our operations.

Second, we defined a program focusing on safety perception and awareness. The aim is to influence behavior and establish root safety as an essential defining value for our colleagues. A true safety culture is only achieved when safety is a value in life and not just at work. This program is being implemented globally, though the travel disruption caused by Covid-19 has forced us to review the timetable.

In addition, we have reviewed our SHE Manual and transformed it into a set of global directives and rules dealing with most relevant safety topics. And this year, we have started to implement a project to standardize the clothing and PPE used at all Stahl sites.

"Knowledge is the cornerstone of Stahl's mindset for process safety."

just as a health crisis, and therefore exclusively linked to SHE, is too simple an approach.

Finally, from a process safety point of view, the situation caused by Covid-19 has not led to any lowering of the safety standards at Stahl. By adopting the necessary safety measure to avoid Covid-19 related hazards, we are ensuring that the right number of personnel oversee active processes. We also conduct all the mandatory inspections and maintenance work that are necessary to keep our operations in full compliance with legal requirements.

Stahl created the role of a Global SHE and Process Safety Manager in 2017 and you have held the position since then. What were the most important projects you realized during this time?

A. Pey: Stahl grew significantly between 2014 and 2017 by acquiring businesses from various companies. This made it necessary to establish a common approach on fundamental SHE & Process Safety aspects. In this

How can the chemical engineering community benefit from your company's know-how and experience?

A. Pey: When it comes to safety and avoiding accidents and losses, we don't think in terms of 'competitors'.





As a result, we are open to sharing our experience if it may be useful to other companies. This approach is, of course, not exclusive to Stahl; many companies view safety in this way, which enables us to also learn from them and share their knowledge and practices.

How has the role of SHE topics changed from—let's say—the 1980s and 1990s to today?

A. Pey: Answering this question in a general way may be unfair to those companies that began using now common concepts a few decades ago. So, I would say that thanks to those who had a different view and took the lead, other companies were able to evolve more easily, even if that evolution happened later.

In my view, the evolution of SHE and other disciplines was linked to the development of new management principles that shifted from a silo conception of companies to a shared responsibility in many fields. In a silo approach, departments are highly independent units with a few clearly defined interfaces with other departments. Under this concept, people did not feel involved in safety issues because safety was an exclusive responsibility of the safety department.

In contrast, the shared responsibility concept encourages everyone in an organization to be aware of their impact in terms of not only safety, but also quality, cost control, company culture, et cetera. Departments are still responsible for defining the principles and processes in their management field. However, once the principles and processes are defined, the responsibility to implement and keep them in place is shared throughout the organization.

How has it impacted corporate cultures and functions?

A. Pey: In terms of impact on corporate culture and functions, I would say that the perception of SHE has evolved in line with society's demands regarding healthy working conditions, environmentally respectful processes, accident prevention, et cetera. What was acceptable to society and legally in the '80s and '90s is no longer acceptable today, just as what was acceptable in the '50s and '60s was no longer acceptable in the '80s and '90s.

As society evolves, so do companies, too, and this evolution is in great part linked to the knowledge availa-

ble. What we know today in many scientific and technical fields was unknown a few decades ago.

It is a self-evident truth, but every age in history has been the most advanced in history, at that time. However, this truism brings me to the concept that interests me the most and that is, how will we answer the same

question in the 2050s and 2060s when we look back to how we do things today? I dare to say that there will be many evident changes and that it will be as hard to understand our current practices as it is for us to understand the practices of the past.

With this concept in mind, one of Stahl's aims is to contribute to

this evolution by taking nothing for granted, analyzing objectively and, with constructive criticism, reviewing principles of SHE and taking initiatives to reach new paradigms.

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