

Presse-Information

Press release • Information de presse

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is by no means premature to predict that ACHEMA 2012 will provide vital stimuli whose impact will reverberate way beyond the boundaries of our branch. This afternoon, the Opening Session will set the ball rolling when it addresses the urgent challenges facing the chemical industry in the wake of the energy turnaround in Germany. This trend will gain momentum tomorrow when the focus will be on the bioeconomy in a panel discussion, followed by the presentation of the Biorefinery Roadmap, commissioned by the German government, in which representatives of the four ministries involved will participate. A further prestigious event tomorrow is the International Congress on Sustainability, Science and Engineering, jointly organized by the American AIChE and DECHEMA, in which representatives of the World Bank will take part. On Tuesday, UNIDO, the Austrian Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, together with the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety will present the Global Chemical Leasing Award. On Wednesday and Thursday, the European Conference on the Bioeconomy will bring together German and European politicians and representatives from organizations and industry.

It is gratifying that politicians acknowledge ACHEMA as a significant, global platform and that it draws representatives of the EU, German government ministries and other organisations to Frankfurt. ACHEMA's charisma is perceived far beyond the worldwide scientific community. And quite rightly so, since the two focus topics of this year's ACHEMA, Energy and the Bioeconomy, demonstrate the interdependence of politics and technological progress.

Nuclear phase-out in Germany was, in the first instance, a political decision. Now the details have to be fleshed out. On the one hand, this is taking place on the social level, where a discussion on grid expansion has begun and which will continue to keep us occupied for a while. However, this must also take place in relation to technologies. Visions always have to be weighed up against what is technologically possible today, what will be available in the near future and what areas most urgently need more research.

The bioeconomy is a similar case: the political will has been formulated on a national and a European level. Its implementation, however, calls for research and development, which involves transforming ideas into technologies and products. Nor should we forget that, ultimately, it is the customer who decides. Industry and sustainability are not mutually exclusive. It is in industry's own best interests to apply the resources it depends upon meaningfully and to manage them sustainably. On the other hand, industry has to adjust its products and services to match what the consumer is prepared to buy and pay. Communicating the "invisible product benefits" – and that is what sustainability criteria are all about – is the joint responsibility of all parties concerned.

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The three interwoven strands of political will, technological performance and products on the markets are not, therefore, a one-way street. We cannot “order” innovations and demand punctual delivery, as with a mail order business. The successful implementation of an innovation depends on constant communication and a balance between what is desirable and what is feasible. In this connection, it is quite realistic to set ambitious goals – researchers and developers thrive on challenges! However, patience is also required, since the transformation of a scientific idea into its industrial production takes time, and this cycle is not always synchronized with the frequency of political change. There is a beautiful analogy for this: a pregnancy lasts nine months; not even the combined resources of the medical professional can accelerate it. Research needs resources, but sometimes it simply needs time.

ACHEMA is particularly well suited for the exchange of ideas between politics, science and industry. Nowhere else is there a comparable concentration of expertise from all areas of the process industry. Nowhere else is it so evident that even supposedly manageable problems, such as the development of a battery or a fuel cell, require the cooperation of many actors. Take a look at the list of exhibitors engaged in “Innovative Energy Carriers and Storage” and you will notice that they are scattered across all sectors: one develops membranes, the other electrolytes and electrode materials, the third sees to it that all components are properly put together. Anyone wishing learn about storage technologies would be well advised to come here. The same holds for biomass processing, pharmaceutical production, the development of new materials and a host of other areas.

ACHEMA can even lower the barrier between research results and applications, which is a stumbling block for many projects. This is explained by the figures: ACHEMA is not only a forum for around 4,000 exhibitors, but also for 900 scientific lectures which attract an audience of some 20,000 and today delineate what will be on display at the next ACHEMA or even the one after that. The congress programme also addresses the focus topics Energy, Bioprocesses and Renewable Resources, besides, of course, featuring contributions on components, instrumentation, control and automation techniques, in fact on all the many individual building blocks which are indispensable to the design of new processes.

ACHEMA is a great place for communication, whether it be between exhibitors and congress participants, between different disciplines or between science, industry, politics and society - and with no regard for national boundaries. I wish that you and all of us will use all these resources to make ACHEMA work for us to maximum advantage!

Thank you for your attention!