

Strategies for sustainable chemistry in the textile industry by 2030

Results of the project market opportunities for “more sustainable chemistry” through the REACH Regulation (Sustainable Sporting Goods – SuSport)



source: pixabay

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TEGEWA



Major challenges for the textile industry

Currently textile “brands” bring twelve or more collections onto the market each year, for the production of which they resort to a pool of about 7000 chemicals. Complex global supply chains challenge transparency about the chemical substances used in production. However, there are European and national efforts to reduce the risks to humans and the environment from chemicals. Key words here include the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the POP Convention and REACH, the UN “Chemicals in Products” program and multi-stakeholder initiatives such as SAICM.

Which obstacles have to be overcome?

The key stakeholders in the textile supply chains, i.e. the manufacturers of textile chemistry as well as the brands and retailers, currently observe knowledge gaps and a lack of demand regarding “sustainable” chemistry as well as limited opportunities to adapt the supply chain processes. In the status quo, brands and retailers work primarily with substance-prohibition lists for their suppliers. This, however, often does not put brands and retailers in the position to provide consumers with information about the problematic substances contained in textiles. In a scenario process, the SuSport project together with textile chain actors developed strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Textile scenario 2030: boldly ahead

- Customers react negatively to problematic chemicals and demand information
- Knowledge about substances and processes has improved
- New business models with respect to “traceability” and “knowledge” were created
- Frontrunners, who produced early with sustainable chemistry, are particularly successful

What needs to be done today to succeed tomorrow?

The project aimed to support a “more sustainable chemistry” in the textile supply chain, thereby expanding the view from the “reactive” compliance position to a “proactive” beyond compliance perspective (“body ahead” scenario). Strategically, this approach is based on the following consideration: **If you want to be “compliant” tomorrow, you must already be “beyond compliance” today.** Such a strategy not only ensures legal compliance, it can rather opens up new market opportunities.

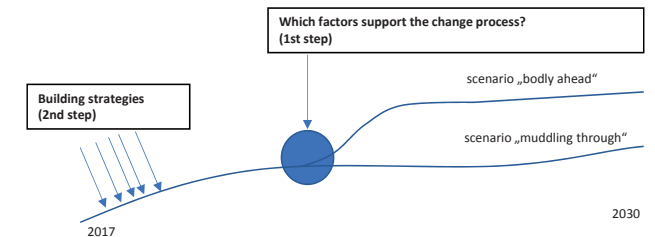


Figure 1: Strategy development based on the scenarios

Results and recommendations

The participants from companies and associations formulated the following findings:

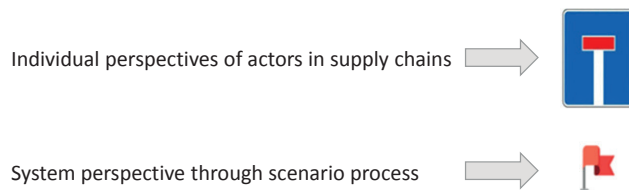
1. The textile industry needs a **consistent approach** that ensures knowledge of the chemicals used in the processes and traceability in the products.
2. It is also important that an **industry standard** ensures long-term global compliance (“beyond compliance”). To achieve this, **cooperation** on the horizontal and vertical levels is required. In addition, further normative impulses are needed to support a consistent sustainable chemicals management.

3. The next step is to put into action priority measures, both within the individual companies and along the supply chains, by winning a group of “**frontrunners**” with a “**boldly ahead**” culture.

4. It is also important to initiate a discussion process at EU level and in the framework of SAICM in order to build up normative impulses and support.

Research methods applied

The project was based on the behavioural transdisciplinary research approach of the research group sofia (“**Delta Analysis**”). Together with the practitioners, the research team developed the goal of a “more sustainable chemistry” in the textile supply chains. On this basis, it was possible to determine which behavioural contributions the different actors have to provide.



When preparing concrete implementation steps, it became apparent that many actors were hampered by their professional thinking and argumentation patterns. In order to open up the perspectives, the “**scenario process**” method developed by Horst Geschka was chosen. The multistage process identified the key impact factors for the “textile industry in 2030” and derived consistent future pictures, which the participants then used as a basis to formulate the two “scenario stories”. The companies were able to position themselves and finally develop strategies to gradually get their preferred “boldly ahead” scenario off the ground.

Textile scenario 2030: muddling through

- “Sustainable” chemistry plays a minor role for the customer, the price is crucial
- Only small gradual changes in the areas of pollution and health problems despite Detox commitments
- Reactive approach in dealing with problematic chemicals
- No uniform industry standards, but parallel individual solutions
- Flexible and self-organizing supply chains enable the delivery of low cost products

Prospect

Based on the findings of the SuSport project, it is now important to support “frontrunners” and to build organizational structures for improved communication in the supply chain; for example, in the LIFE Project “AskREACH”, which receives EU-funding in the years 2017-2022.
www.askreach.eu

At the same time, the strategies developed in SuSport are already providing answers to new regulatory challenges. The “circular economy” initiative led the EU to revise the Waste Framework Directive. Thereafter, starting 2021, all suppliers operating on the EU market must report to a central database each article containing, e.g. in constituent parts, more than 0.1% of SVHC.



Society for Institutional Analysis - sofia

The interdisciplinary **sofia**-team consists of lawyers, economists, engineers, social scientists and natural scientists. The Research Group investigates regulatory options for action at regional, national or European level. Research projects by sofia deal with the institutional framework conditions for “sustainable development”.

More information at <http://www.sofia-research.com/susport.html>, with a short animated video on the results of SuSport.

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