

LUBES'n'GREASES

EUROPE – MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA

A Message on REACH and Metalworking Fluids:

KEEP THE LINES – COMMUNICATION AND SUPPLY – OPEN

By Frans van Antwerpen

Performance criteria are, of course, primary factors in the selection of metal-working fluids, but it is also important that end users consider safety, health and environmental issues. And while the latter may include industry-driven demands, there are also legislative requirements at the local, country, and European Union levels.

Requirements change or are added frequently, and this leads to a continuous reformulation of metalworking fluids.

Change is underway again with the EU's implementation of REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals), which replaces existing country legislation. The new rules will serve as another reason to reformulate metalworking fluids, not only for safety, health and environmen-

Existing chemicals must be preregistered by the producer or importer in the period between 1 June and 30 November 2008.

Metalworking fluids, as well as other types of lubricants, don't have to be registered, since lube blenders are considered downstream users. However, it will be very important for producers of lubricants to list as soon as possible the additives they use in their products and contact their suppliers in order to find out whether the additive supplier will preregister these products. Particularly in the case of chemicals used in metalworking fluids, suppliers may elect not to do so because the segment is relatively small, and substance volumes may not warrant the cost of registration.

If a substance is not preregistered, it cannot be sold after 1 December 2008, unless the producer or importer produce or import less than one ton per year. However, it is permissible to preregister substances with a volume below one ton, and preregistration does not obligate a company to go through the registration process later if volume does not exceed one ton, or if production ceases.

It may make sense, therefore, for an additive supplier to preregister, especially if the expectation is that the volume will exceed one ton in the future. There are no registration costs for volumes produced or imported below 10 tons per year, although there will of course be the cost of obtaining a limited amount



tal reasons, but also because several additives may no longer be available if producers elect not to take them through the preregistration process established by REACH.

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of data for the registration file. It may be useful for a blender of lubricants to inform its additive suppliers confidentially about volumes it plans to purchase in the future to help the additive supplier to make an informed decision.

Confidentiality will be an important issue for suppliers of metalworking fluids. REACH will increase the necessity for more communications along the supply chain, especially between additive suppliers and blenders, since suppliers of chemicals must provide information about all applications of their products.

But increased communications will sometimes also be necessary between fluid producers. The reason is that many suppliers of industrial lubricants, especially metalworking fluid companies, provide chemical management programs to their customers. Under these programs the chemical management provider manages for its customers the industrial fluids that do not become part of the final product. But a chemical management provider will typically have to purchase products from other industrial lubricant suppliers in addition to using its own products.

Another important point for producers of lubricants to note is that if they directly import chemical substances (additives) from outside the EU, they will be viewed under REACH as importers and not as downstream users. These producers must either find a producer in the EU or convince the foreign producer to preregister the product.

Another, more likely scenario, is that a lubricant supplier imports finished products from its overseas parent company. In such cases, the additives contained in the lubricant must be preregistered substances if the annual imported volume of these additives exceeds one ton per year. Normally, a metalworking fluids supplier should want to avoid going through the whole REACH registration process itself to register additives. And most likely a foreign additive producer will not be interested anyhow in letting a customer be the registrant,

since all kinds of detailed, often proprietary information must be furnished to the registrant.

The suppliers of industrial lubricants must also pay attention to the labeling of their products. The European system of labeling is scheduled to be replaced by the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS), agreed upon by the United Nations in 2002. In the EU, the GHS requirements for safety information sheets will be part of the REACH legislation (Article 31 and Appendix II). The original intent was to implement the GHS "hazard communication" system at the same time as REACH, but some delay occurred at the European Commission. Nevertheless, in June the commission presented its proposal to the European Parliament, which will discuss the proposed system in the coming months.

The goal of REACH is to improve the protection of human health and the environment through better and earlier identification of the properties of chemical substances. There will be challenges along the way for the suppliers and users of chemical substances, but the benefits will hopefully become clear as more and more substances are phased into REACH. ❖



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