

Six months on from the formation of a Strategic Alliance of lead producers and lead battery associations, the senior executives from each of them describe the progress made so far thanks to this historic partnership and future goals.

In unity is strength

Aristotle had it right. The whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. And that's been the thinking of a hugely important initiative for the trade bodies that look after the lead battery world.

The battery associations of Europe (EUROBAT) and North America (BCI), the global trade association for the lead industry (ILA) and the US



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— Mark Thorsby, BCI

association for lead recyclers (ABR) have agreed to coordinate activities, goals and share resources. Although their mandate to represent the interest of their members continue, this ambition has taken the form of a Strategic Alliance, which means regular communications and an aligning of business plans in certain areas while sharing ideas and resources.

The formation of the alliance was driven by fundamental changes in the market place for lead and lead-acid battery products. Its ambition is to advance the cause of lead batteries in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive marketplace.

From the start, the body said it has three objectives: to ensure lead batteries are regarded as the future product of choice; that the benefits of lead-based products and in particular lead batteries are recognized more widely outside the industry; and that regulation on lead batteries takes full account of their highly sustainable properties.

Six months in things seem to be progressing more than just nicely.

Though these are early days for the alliance, the first signs are promising and the lead and lead-acid battery industries will ultimately reap rich rewards on the back of the formation, according to Andy Bush, managing director of ILA, representing the producers of about three million tonnes of lead annually.

While the four founding bodies have worked together informally for many years on specific issues, Bush says that, six months in, the broader, formal relationship is working well. They have much more interaction now at all levels, from their chief executives down. “That alone is great progress for the industry,” Bush says.

Alfons Westgeest, executive director of EUROBAT, adds that he feels the initiative has started well. “Since its launch, we feel the Alliance has proceeded very quickly and made good

progress. It is very important to the global lead battery industry from a market perspective and a regulatory perspective,” he says.

Rob Steinwurtzel, leader of Baker-Hostetler’s national environmental team, is also the general counsel for the US association for lead recyclers. Its members are mainly smelters in Canada, the US and Mexico which are also often manufacturers as well.

Steinwurtzel is also positive about the initiative so far.

The lead industry is a small one in terms of the companies operating in the space and many find themselves members of more than one trade association. Yet historically, there has been little co-ordination with trade associations working on similar issues in different geographical locations without working together or comparing and sharing materials.

Logical progression

“Yet we have limited resources and overlapping memberships. This alliance makes complete sense on that basis and should encourage us all to make the best use of our resources and focus on our priorities,” says Steinwurtzel.

While there was always communication between the associations, there was no structure to it. “This seemed a logical next step for the industry,” he says. “It is natural for us to organize ourselves in a manner that allows us to divide up resources, partner on common issues and support each other where needed.

“There will be long-term goals we pursue collectively now with our combined resources and we can agree on uniform positions meaning that at least none of us will be blindsided.”

Mark Thorsby, chief executive of the BCI, is one of the key architects of the Alliance. He is also delighted with progress so far but wary of being drawn on specific goals at this stage.

He compares trying to discuss any

end point or long term goals for the Alliance as being like taking a picture during a long journey. “Where you are going is pretty fluid and although there may be aspirations of a certain destination, the specifics are just not there,” he says.

The concept of international cooperation between associations has been around for a long time but the global nature of the industry has quickened in recent years as more companies have invested in physical operations in new markets such as China.

“As the industry has become more interconnected and global the need for better collaboration has intensified,” Thorsby says. “The speed of communication has also changed the landscape.

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Thorsby says things developed into something more tangible around three years ago when he and Bush from the ILA were working on strategic plans at the same time and Bush shared his work with him.

“It was unbelievable. It was almost identical to what I had been working on. One of us suggested effectively agreeing on one strategic plan for both associations and then we thought why not involve EUROBAT and the ABR as well. It would mean the four most prominent industry associations singing from the same hymn sheet and we thought that would be very powerful.”

It's good to share

One thing all the members agree on is that it offers them the ability to share resources and expertise. Bush says the alliance is working on a number of specific initiatives that it will later reveal to the industry, at this stage the collaboration is more about sharing resources and working together more efficiently.

“There is also the clear sense that we have an overarching strategy now that encompasses the objectives of all associations,” Bush says.

In terms of resources, ILA has appointed, Cris Williams, a senior health

scientist whose remit is to provide expertise on lead toxicology and risk assessment. Williams will be based in ILA's offices in Durham, North Carolina. He previously worked for the consulting firm Ramboll Environ and has more than 21 years of experience in applied toxicology, quantitative risk assessment and public health.

While Williams is fully funded by ILA, he will provide expertise and scientific credibility to all the bodies involved in the collaboration.

“He offers us a much-needed expertise on health issues. That remains a major challenge for the industry and there is a need for our own expert in the area. It is a gap we felt it was important to fill.

“He'll be available to help any of the lead or lead battery bodies worldwide —some of our other partners in the collaboration were involved in the recruitment process. His knowledge and experience will allow us to engage with regulators and government in a more robust way when it comes to health risks.

Thorsby also extols the virtues of the idea of sharing everything from research to specific expertise. Different associations have skills and resources in different areas. This means that a different body might take the lead on projects depending on the type and nature of that project.

“We are not all things to all people,” he says. “For example, ILA has several talented people on staff whose expertise is in healthcare and science. If the BCI needs expertise in this field we do not need to go out and hire someone — we can go to the ILA. Likewise, we have some talented people on the communications side.”

Thorsby says the idea of the Alliance has been well received by the industry. “Candidly the main response was: ‘it's about time’. This should almost be standard operating procedure; we should always be in collaboration.

“We have a story to tell and we have not always done a good job of telling it. But this has given us a renewed commitment to being bold and bullish when talking about our industry.”

Perhaps critically, the desire to work together is being driven from the top, Bush says. He says the heads of the four associations arrange a call every other week, during which they review the major activities underway and ensure each body is clear of its role in

moving things forward.

That call also offers a chance to discuss the best way of resourcing certain projects and identifying the most suitable expertise in each instance.

The interaction goes further than this sometimes. Bush says ILA welcomes the heads of the other associations into its board meetings, allowing more high level discussion on a range of issues.

Although the venture was formally launched at the start of the year — and initial talks started to become more tangible during the ABC conference in Bangkok last September — the first litmus test of public sentiment towards the idea came at the BCI annual conference this May.

All four associations were in attendance and held a meeting at the event.



There are four factors driving demand for distributed energy storage. These are the high cost of demand charges for commercial utility customers, the closing of local nuclear plants, the state-wide mandate requiring 1.3GW of energy storage by 2020 and, the Self Generation Incentive Program that provides funding for distributed energy storage resources.

— Andy Bush, ILA



“The main objective is to establish a secure and sustainable market for lead-acid batteries and that means negotiating multiple regulatory and legislative challenges. For many issues, Europe is at the forefront of these changes. This is a global business and we know that other regions globally watch closely what happens in Europe — and that makes our work even more important” — Alfons Westgeest



We quickly recognized that the colour coding of different battery chemistries, mainly to prevent lithium-ion batteries ending up in the lead-acid recycling chain — with potentially fatal and explosive results was not a US or North American problem. By working with the ILA, for example, it gives it a much larger scope” — Rob Steinwurtzel, ABR

Bush says the overall feedback at BCI was positive. “People liked the idea of the collaboration but also wanted to see action from the industry,” he says. “Our interests are intrinsically aligned so working together is obvious — and so are the benefits.

“It was clear this was something the industry wanted to see happen. But the point also came through that many believe this should extend beyond Europe and North America. There are many trade associations in other countries with interests in lead and lead batteries, so we’ll aim long term to get more partners involved in this globally.”

Communications first

While reluctant to be too specific on many things — some rightly and perhaps some wrongly — one of its previously announced initiatives is a communications campaign that will focus on North America. This is initially designed to better inform people and companies of the benefits of lead-acid batteries, emphasizing some of the industry’s real benefits such as its very high recycling rates.

Bush says that having four bodies backing and offering input into such a campaign makes it much more effective and carries much more weight.

“In the past such an initiative would have been driven forward by just one body, this will be a collaboration between all of us now and it will be more effective for that,” he says.

“Things may take longer to set up initially given the extra input and coordination required when working across four associations, but the real point is that the industry will ultimately achieve its goals much quicker in the end.

Steinwurtzel also praises the broader communications campaign in North America that is designed to educate key decision makers and regulators to better inform them of the benefits of lead, especially its high recycle rates.

Thorsby says a lot of good innovation in the industry has largely been ignored and not well communicated. Part of the North American communications campaign will highlight this — itself a great example of what the Alliance can achieve when working together.

The communications campaign will reach out to key players in the US battery space and is designed to dispel

myths around lead batteries and highlight innovation in the sector, “The idea is to tell the many positive stories this industry has,” Thorsby says.

“We’ve completed a lot of the survey work and research which demonstrates that there is a relatively small group of people who influence policy affecting batteries. But we know that the Alliance means we can be a lot more assertive and confident in our approach to this.”

As well as the North America communications awareness campaign, some of the key priorities for this year are the launch of the new Advanced Lead Acid Battery Consortium research program under the reorganized ILA structure. This has a focus on fundamental research — securing a further exemption for lead batteries from the ban on lead in vehicles under the EU End of Life Vehicle Directive and addressing the threats to lead batteries under the REACH authorization process.

Rob Steinwurtzel, leader of Baker Hostetler’s national environmental team, highlights another topic important to his members and on the agenda of the alliance.

Steinwurtzel gives the colour coding of different battery chemistries, mainly to prevent lithium-ion batteries ending up in the lead-acid recycling chain — with potentially fatal and explosive results — as an example of how the industry can potentially achieve more much faster by working together.

He says the ABR started to move on this issue many years ago but: “We quickly recognized that this was not a US or North American problem. By working with the ILA, for example, it gives it a much larger scope and represents a perfect example of how an issue benefits from this broader approach.”

The recycling goal is an important one for the Alliance — in addition to colour coded labels, it is also looking at other technical means by which the batteries could be separated at recycling faculties.

Regulatory challenges

While all members of the Alliance are cagey about specific projects and targets the members have set — though this secrecy and caution does appear at odds in terms of transparency to the needs of its members — Steinwurtzel says there are around 15 projects in the pipeline.

BCI



Battery Council International is a not-for-profit trade association formed to promote the interests of the international battery industry. BCI has more than 200 member companies worldwide engaged in every facet of the industry: lead battery manufacturers and recyclers, marketers and retailers, suppliers of raw materials and equipment, and expert consultants. As the industry’s principle association, BCI’s member services have a global impact. BCI brings together the leading lead battery manufacturers in North America and other major players from around the world. Externally, BCI provides information and resources on the industry to various outside organizations and researchers. BCI establishes technical standards for battery manufacturing and actively promotes workable environmental, health and safety standards for the industry as a whole. BCI actively promotes the recycling of lead batteries.

EUROBAT



EUROBAT is the association for the European manufacturers of automotive, industrial and energy storage batteries. EUROBAT has 53 members from across the continent comprising more than 90% of the automotive and industrial battery industry in Europe. The members and staff work with all stakeholders, such as battery users, governmental organisations and media, to develop new battery solutions in areas of hybrid and electro-mobility as well as grid flexibility and renewable energy storage.

THE ASSOCIATION OF BATTERY RECYCLERS



The Association of Battery Recyclers (ABR) represents companies that recycle spent lead batteries in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. We turn spent batteries into lead metal, plastic and sodium sulfate which are used to manufacture new lead batteries and other lead products. Its members recycle over 150 million spent batteries annually. In North America, 99% of all lead batteries are recycled. This represents the highest recycle rate of any consumer product.

THE ILA



The International Lead Association is a focused organization dedicated to serving lead producers and other companies that have a direct interest in lead and its use. With resources located in London, England and North Carolina and Washington in the US it provides a mix of technical, scientific and communications support from staff and specialist consultants including chemists, electrochemists, toxicologists and environmental specialists. The ILA’s roots stem from the Lead Development Association, which was founded in 1946 primarily to support market development. Today its role is much broader and focused on all aspects of the industry’s safe production, use and recycling of lead.

LEAD BATTERIES: THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Another one he will discuss, is a coordinated response and communications effort in response to moves by the State of California to review and potentially tighten health and safety standards in the workplace including redefining acceptable levels of lead in the blood and air exposure levels to lead.

“There is a proposal out there and while that is specific to California at the moment, it could pave the way for other states and even the federal government to follow suit. We are now coordinating a response and sharing communications with state regulators.

“Naturally, our voice counts for more if there are four associations instead of one.”

In relation to proposals such as this, Thorsby says the Alliance can make a legitimate case on such matters because the industry has so often taken matters into its own hands on such issues.

Three years ago, EUROBAT, BCI and the ILA agreed to target lowering blood levels in workers in the lead industry from the current regulated level of 40µg/dL to a voluntary standard of 30 µg/dL by 2016.

“That would mean levels would come down, which would be quite something, and well below government recommended levels. We still have some work to do but that is the sort of achievement that is possible if we work collaboratively,” he says.

But such challenges are not limited to North America. Westgeest at EUROBAT says: “Given the regulatory context in Europe, the work of EUROBAT is very important and we are happy to take leadership on any European issues but we’re also aware that our work has wider implications and applications beyond Europe that our partners will find useful.

“The main objective is to establish a secure and sustainable market for lead-acid batteries and that means negotiating multiple regulatory and legislative challenges. For many issues, Europe is at the forefront of these changes. This is a global business and we know that other regions globally watch closely what happens in Europe — and that makes our work even more important.

Going global

One of the other long term aims of the members seems is also to spread

the word further afield, potentially by adding new members.

Steinwurtzel believes that the Alliance’s long term aim should be to grow further and involve more trade associations from elsewhere in the world. The ABR, he says, has restricted its geographic remit and will enjoy the benefits of a more global reach.

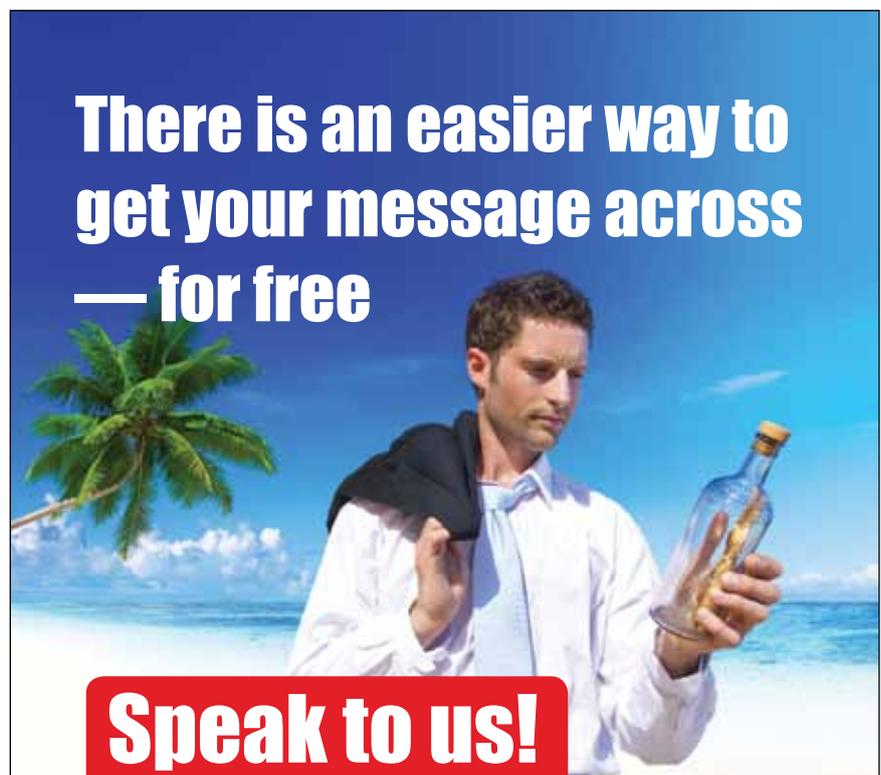
“Many of our issues are global and our expertise can be applied globally,” he says. “A few years ago CEC prepared a paper that set out the best management guidance practices for smelters covering a range of health and safety issues.

“The ABR and BCI worked with CEC in the development of the guidelines including arranging for visits by the CEC to representative smelters in Mexico, Canada and the US. The guid-

ance was issued for North American smelters but would have been relevant anywhere in the world. This partnership may allow us to better share information such as that.”

Thorsby agrees that more members would make the Alliance even more powerful.

He sees the Alliance as having three main objectives: to ensure lead batteries remain the product of choice in a world where there is often misinformation about the chemistry; to consistently tell the many positive aspects of the lead battery story and highlight innovation and new technology being developed; and to help create a regulatory environment that allows members to operate economically and produce a reliable product that meets the energy needs of the world. 🇺🇸



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