

Spotlight on Afera Gold Sponsor: adhesive raw materials supplier ICHEMCO

Director of Sales and Marketing Willem Reitsma discusses the Italian adhesive raw materials supplier's 45-year history in supplying ready-to-coat PSAs and specialty chemicals such as release agents to the adhesive tapes industry around the world—including the company's competitive edge and his reason for joining Afera events.



ichemco
Developing Chemical Excellence

ICHEMCO S.r.l is a northern Italian chemical company specialising in the production of adhesives, coatings and specialty chemicals, particularly for the tapes and

labels industries, as well as those of other converting applications. An Afera Member for over three decades, the global supplier is known for its work with water-based and solvent-based adhesives, as well as hot-melt products. ICHEMCO's product portfolio often includes release agents, primers, antioxidant blends, tackifiers and colorants, which are essential in the production of adhesive tapes and films.

Originally trained as a pharmacist, Willem Reitsma, who is ICHEMCO's director of marketing and sales, has been in the tapes business since 2014, except for a three-year stint in sales with an Italian commodity chemicals company. He has always worked in marketing and sales. As of [Afera's most recent Annual Conference in Thessaloniki](#), Dr. Reitsma has been a Member of [the Marketing Committee of the Association](#). "ICHEMCO has been a Member of Afera for 30 years, and beginning 28 years ago, my colleague Francesca Bellini has attended numerous events," he shared. "I have participated in the last three Annual Conferences not only to network but to obtain market data and information." Below he shares ICHEMCO's current foci and his views on the market.

ICHEMCO's #1 product: powder form PVODC release agents

"We supply all the specialty chemicals used to manufacture pressure sensitive products like tapes, films, protective films and labels," said Dr. Reitsma. "But we are



specialised in the production of release agents, a wide range of products of which we are the world leader, especially in the powder form PVODC release agents.” ICHEMCO produces special primers, antioxidant blends and water-based, solvent-based and solventless adhesives.

Headquartered in Milan, ICHEMCO focuses on innovation and sustainable solutions, aligning with trends in environmentally friendly and regulatory-compliant products for industrial applications. It serves a global clientele, with a strong emphasis on customisation to meet specific performance requirements for various industries.



Serving a niche market for 45 years, focussing on tape manufacturers

ICHEMCO was established in 1979 with the aim of offering specialty products designed for well-defined industry segments in conjunction with excellent service. Having started with a wide range of products for pressure sensitive applications, the company has broadened its catalogue to include

products for adhesive, textile and leather finishing. Its main target, however, remains the PSA industry: tape manufacturers. For them, it provides complete knowhow and technical service for virtually any end product, whether made using waterborne, solvent-based, hot-melt or solvent-less UV-curing technology.

“We have one location for our production, laboratory and offices, which are our headquarters, and from here, bring our business to 67 countries,” Dr. Reitsma continued. “ICHEMCO’s domestic versus export sales ratio is 50-50, depending on the year.”

In 2023, ICHEMCO founder Ezio Curioni stepped down from the board of directors, and his son and General Manager Riccardo Curioni became president of the board. Since this time, ICHEMCO has been redefining its commercial branding.

“Lately, we have focussed on the protective films industry,” Dr. Reitsma divulged. “We have developed new natural-rubber, solvent-based PSAs for the production of protective films. This has boosted the production and sales of our product line a lot, helping us to gain significant market share worldwide.”

Their offering

ICHEMCO develops, produces and markets all over the world:

- ✓ **Ready-to-coat PSAs** (for tapes, labels, lamination, foams, medical and all other applications), including waterborne acrylic adhesives, SBR adhesives, solvent-based acrylic adhesives, natural rubber adhesives, hot-melt and solvent-less UV curable adhesives, and Dow silicone adhesives.
- ✓ **Speciality chemicals**, including release agents for tapes in solvent, waterborne or 100% solids, high-performance antioxidant and UV protectors, isocyanate cross-linkers and other curing agents, primers, and colour pigments and masterbatches for adhesives.
- ✓ **Products for the printing of PSA tapes**, including special inks and release coatings, primers, additives, diluents and thickeners.
- ✓ **Consultancy services and laboratory testing equipment:** Through its partner company IchTAC, ICHEMCO represents ChemInstruments in many European, Middle East and African countries, providing machines for testing the quality of PSA products (peel adhesion, shear, tack, etc.) and consultancy services for PSA applications.



“ICHEMCO is focussing heavily on solvent-based, natural-rubber PSAs for protective films and removeable tapes,” Dr. Reitsma explained. “We are also focussed on release agents for co-extrusion.” The supplier has developed a masterbatch for co-extrusion of already released (non-silicone) films and their antioxidant and UV-stabiliser blends. “This is something we continually study,” he continued. “We are working on new research to prove the importance of the antioxidant in the formulations and how our antioxidants work better compared to those of our competitors.”



ICHEMCO's competitive edge

The specialty chemical supplier's market competitiveness is based on:

The excellence and reliability of its products and sound manufacturing process, which provides repeatability in product quality.

The flexibility of a small company with the quality of a big company. "So we

can customise most of our products for our customers, starting with very low volumes—that is our big plus," Dr. Reitsma revealed. "Other big multinational players refer their customers to us for some products, because they will not make them in such small quantities. That is where we step in."

The changes in markets and trends ICHEMCO sees

Disruption upon disruption—the normalisation of change.

"Identifying trends and understanding the market have been tough exercises over the last four or five years, because we haven't had a standard year to refer to since 2019," Dr. Reitsma said. "First we had covid, followed by shipping disruptions



worldwide, and when these were finally resolved, the Russia-Ukraine war started. Just when markets had adapted to this, the Israel-Palestine conflict flared up, and we are dealing with pirates in the Red Sea." Every year seems to see new disruption which prevents the steadiness of markets.

Short ordering. "If you take the point of view that we have reached a new, post-covid normal, I would say that what has changed since the pandemic is forecasting and order planning," said Dr. Reitsma. "What I see today in the market is that everyone places orders very last-minute again."

Resurgence of higher-end products. Currently for ICHEMCO, the market is growing and more into the specialties. For commodities, he offered, "China is really busting the market a fair bit." For Europe, however, Dr. Reitsma sees much more focus on quality and higher-end products in the markets of Europe and worldwide. "For our customers, I see the comeback of making quality products... Previously, there was a sort of acceptance of whatever was on the market as long as

there was something which could be utilised, but now we are returning to a demand for good-quality products for special applications.”

Customers no longer just accept using something to merely get by with their formulations, but this trend contrasts with the actual spending power of people. We want more quality products—and not something which breaks or transfers onto surfaces when it should be removeable—but regions such as southern Europe have reduced buying power due to inflation. The end customer wants *more* for *less*.

“We are meeting this with developing natural-rubber, solvent-based adhesives and special release agents for protective films, which, with our substantial investment, is seeing an increase in sales which had slowed over the last few years,” Dr. Reitsma commented.

Their current foci

Over the last five or ten years, ICHEMCO has focussed primarily on:

- ✓ **High-quality products:**
 - **PVODC release agents for co-extrusion**, in which the specialty chemicals supplier has become one of the world leaders. They concluded a two-year bottlenecking programme in May 2024 that will allow the company to reuse 50% more release agents than before.
 - **Solvent-based, natural-rubber adhesives for removeable and protective films**. ICHEMCO invested in and is now harvesting the fruit of research into this technology.
 - **Antioxidants**. The company has spent 10 years researching and developing these chemicals.
- ✓ **A sustainable model of business**. ICHEMCO has invested heavily in the environmental friendliness of their products.
 - **Good manufacturing processes**. They have made a large investment in a distilling station to recover solvents to reduce waste and emissions. Three of the company’s products have been certified as having zero chemical waste from the beginning to end of the manufacturing process. For its antioxidants, ICHEMCO has incorporated a new packaging system to optimise shipping costs in terms of weight and volume of the loads. Lastly, the company is currently in the process of doubling its capacity to produce its own electric energy.



For more information, visit www.ichemco.it.