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Accelerating Collaborative Sustainability in the Tapes Industry

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Be it any industry, transitioning towards a sustainable and circular future requires **collaboration and co-creation**. Not just with stakeholders within the industry but also those beyond immediate industry boundaries. This concept of vertical and horizontal collaborations was shared by one of the speakers, Dr. Felix Schultz, at Afera's Annual Conference last year in Malta. In his presentation, he shared the research findings¹ on systemic eco-innovation for a circular economy, highlighting the importance of **strategic alliances with specialized partners** within and outside the industry.



With more than 40 companies from the adhesive tape value chain participating, the foundation of Afera's Flagship Sustainability Project (AFSP) is built on collaboration. Over 50 participants from these companies attend the workstream meetings, sharing their time, resources, and expertise to enable the **green transition for the tapes industry**. Within each of the three AFSP workstreams, we have established horizontal collaborations as well to achieve project goals and key milestones.

Sticking together for a sustainable future

Image credit: Microsoft Designer

Partnerships and ways of collaboration

The project aims to translate the European Green Deal (EGD) to the adhesive tape industry. The three workstreams focus on key topics of **carbon accounting, waste management, and advocacy**. Let's look at some of the strategic partnerships that have enabled progress in these key areas of focus.

#1 – Developing a curated tool to enhance accuracy and transparency in PCF calculations

At this year's Annual Conference in Thessaloniki, Greece, the launch of **the first draft of the Product Carbon Footprint (PCF) tool** on 26 September 2024 was a major milestone for the project.

PCF is a well-established method for assessing the climate impact of a product. It quantifies the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated by the product throughout its entire life cycle. This is crucial for meeting future legal obligations and addressing supply chain demands related to **scope 3 emissions**.

Having identified this need to assess the environmental impact of various adhesive tapes, Afera entered a collaboration with the **German Adhesive Association, IVK**. Together, the 2 associations have been working with **LCA consultant, Sphera** since last year to develop the curated PCF tool.

The [Afera PCF tool](#) is based on a **validated calculation methodology** based on 'ISO standard 14067:2018: Greenhouse Gases – Carbon Footprint of Products' through an expansion of the **Together for Sustainability (Tfs) PCF** Guideline. The web-based tool is being designed for use by non-LCA experts and provides access to a **high-quality database**, which includes raw material data relevant to the adhesive tape industry. This will allow tape manufacturers to determine PCF values for adhesives and tapes in a straightforward, transparent, and affordable manner.



Collaborative tool development for accurate and transparent PCF calculations

Image credit: Microsoft Designer

#2 – Streamlining release liner recycling and re-use

Release liners play a crucial role in protecting adhesive-coated products like **tapes and labels**, ensuring they don't stick together. From coated paper to plastic films, various release liners are utilized. However, once the tapes or labels are used, they often become waste. Although recycling options exist, challenges persist in waste collection and maintaining the quality of the feedstock.

To address these challenges for the label industry, FINAT – the European self-adhesive labelling industry association currently has an ongoing **recycling initiative called CELAB-Europe**.² The target CELAB has set for itself is for >75% of the used release liner and matrix material to follow a circular business model by 2025.

Therefore, cooperating on this common topic of release liner was a natural outcome. CELAB provided a **database of release liner waste collectors and recyclers** to the waste management workstream of AFSP.



Keeping the liner in the loop

The workstream also invited **Cycle4Green** – a company that supports **closed-loop recycling** of release liners – to give a workshop regarding the recyclability of release liners.

Such collaborative efforts have strengthened Afera's efforts to [keep the liner in the loop](#). A dedicated webpage is currently under development, which will share relevant information on **recycling of release liners from adhesive tapes**. The page will include a validated list of waste collectors and recyclers, requirements for collection, the recovery process being applied, etc.

#3 – Assessing the impact of key regulatory updates on the tape industry

At Afera, we constantly team up with **organisations in adjacent technologies and sectors** for mutual learning and support in industry-wide and regulatory activities. This includes collaborating with **chemical and environmental organisations** and their working groups such as **ECHA** (The European Chemicals Agency), **CEFIC** (The European Chemical Industry Council), **FEICA** (The European Adhesive and Sealant Industry Association), **IRLA** (International Release Liner Association), **EUROPEN** (The European Organisation for Packaging and the Environment) and other E.U. expert groups in Brussels.

Recently, Afera has participated in issuing the following industry statements:

As a member of **CheMI**, a platform for **downstream users of chemicals** in manufacturing industries, Afera co-signed a [manifesto](#) calling on E.U. legislators in the next legislative period to:

- Consider the impact on downstream users when regulating chemicals
- Enhance market surveillance for fair competition
- Set as priority the competitiveness of European companies, including the users of chemicals (such as adhesive tapes), when drawing up legislation
- Foster better regulation, considering the impact of chemical legislative changes on downstream users, specifically SMEs.



Collaborative advocacy with organisations in adjacent sectors

Similarly, as a member of the **Packaging Chain Forum** managed by EUROPEN, Afera co-signed a [manifesto](#) expressing serious concerns about the European Commission's suggested approach on **packaging and packaging waste regulation (PPWR)**:

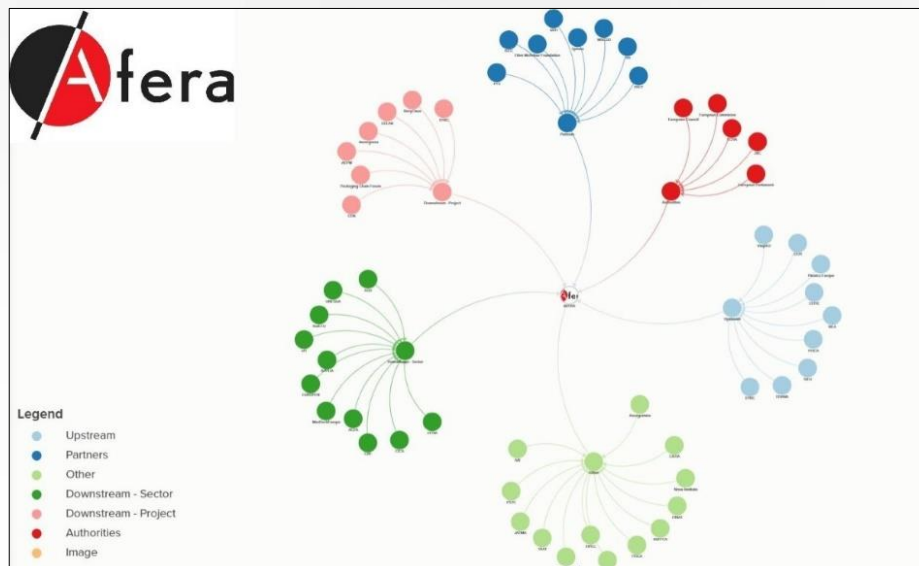
- Legislators' policy priorities must include both environmental AND economic success, so that European industry may remain competitive
- E.U. industries investing in sustainability should not be disadvantaged when compared to those elsewhere in the world
- New legislation should ensure coherence of the single market over fragmentation into individual member states.

In addition to **PPWR**, Afera's regulatory working group is also focusing on key regulations and directives such as:

- PVC REACH Restriction
- Microplastics REACH Restriction
- Deforestation Regulation
- Green Claims Directive
- Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
- Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive

Conclusion

At a global level, Afera has active collaborations with tape associations in the U.S. (PSTC), China (CATIA), Japan (JATMA), and Taiwan (TAAT). The benefits of collaboration and co-creation offer are clear. In line with this, the **Advocacy Workstream of AFSP** is focusing on fostering partnerships with external stakeholders across the adhesive tape value chain.



Afera stakeholder interactive map

Our objective is to stay updated with the changes that are happening in other industries and explore cooperation on common topics that can help drive **sustainability and circularity**.

References

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621026573>

² <https://www.finat.com/sustainability/recycling>