

The adhesive of great memories: Honouring Dr. Axel Hessland

Following Dr. Axel Hessland's retirement on 1 March 2026, Afera takes a moment to recognise a long-standing contributor whose technical expertise, regulatory insight and collegial spirit have left a lasting mark on the Association.

Dr. Axel Hessland retired on 1 March 2026 after many years of service to the adhesives and adhesive tapes sectors. For Afera, it is a fitting moment to honour not only a highly knowledgeable technical and regulatory expert, but a familiar and valued presence whose contribution has shaped committee work, industry dialogue and cross-sector co-ordination over many years.

Afera Members know Dr. Hessland through his long-standing role at IVK, the German Adhesives Association, a long-time Affiliated Member of Afera based in Düsseldorf. He has devoted 34 years to adhesive bonding, including 28 years at IVK, where he served as managing director of technical affairs from 2010 until his retirement. Before that, he worked as a scientist and consultant at Fraunhofer IFAM. Over time, he became a steady bridge between the worlds of adhesives and adhesive tapes, bringing technical depth, regulatory perspective and a distinctly European view to Afera's work.



A long connection to Afera

That connection began early. "At the end of 1999, I took over responsibility for the IVK Adhesive Tapes Technical Committee and Commercial Working Group from Klaus Winkels," he recalled. "Both of these groups have worked with Afera for a long time."

What followed was years of active involvement in Afera's Technical Committee and related working groups. He also recalls giving his first presentation to the TC at a Meeting in Istanbul in September 2003. Over the years, Dr. Hessland represented both IVK and FEICA and, in different periods, served in FEICA's technical work on hazardous products, environment and chemicals legislation. He was also active in Afera's Regulatory Affairs Working Group and in Afera Flagship Sustainability Project (AFSP) Workstreams 1 (Calculation Methods) and 3 (Advocacy).

What stands out in conversations with Dr. Hessland over the years is how clearly he understood Afera's role. "Afera is the gateway to the European stage, i.e. the European Commission, European Parliament, European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), etc., to which national associations such as IVK usually do not have access," he said. He also pointed to Afera's role in standardisation through the Global Tape Forum (GTF) and its experience within European and international bodies.

That was never just a formal observation. It reflected the way he worked: connecting national and European perspectives, helping align positions and recognising that the industry needed both technical substance and collective representation.

A bridge between adhesives and tapes

Dr. Hessland consistently brought a wider industry perspective to Afera. “It is a great experience to see that your own ideas and thoughts become part of a strategy and action plan to develop and increase the adhesive tape business in a future-proof and sustainable way,” he said. He added that his work within IVK and FEICA allowed him “to bring solutions from the world of adhesives into the world of adhesive tapes, and vice versa, something which may generate additional synergies.”



That role as a connector runs through his Afera profile. He spoke warmly of “the great feeling and wonderful experience of being a part of the adhesive tape family” and said that his favourite aspect of Afera Membership was “the connection to the European tape manufacturer and raw material supplier ‘scene’ and family.” At the same time, he never lost sight of the purpose behind that connection. He stressed the importance of safeguarding the technical, political and economic interests of German adhesive tape manufacturers at European level and saw clear value in linking FEICA and Afera more closely.

He also had a keen sense of where the sector was heading. In 2020, he forecast that the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Renovation Wave would have a significant impact on adhesive bonding technology and said that one of Afera’s main tasks would be to help its Membership make the best of those changes sweeping through industry.

The detailed work behind the scenes

Dr. Hessland’s contribution to Afera was never only strategic. He was deeply involved in the detailed, often demanding work that keeps an industry association relevant and credible.

Through his involvement in the TC, he was already helping Afera in 2014 to consider how to feed into the revision of the BREF on surface treatment using organic solvents. Beginning in 2015, he was part of work related to ERPC, reporting back on issues affecting adhesive tapes in paper recycling discussions. In 2018, he facilitated the INGEDE/IVK-Afera research project on the removability of non-soluble adhesives, including proposed exemption testing for certain hot-melt adhesive applications.

He also worked in detail behind the scenes on circular economy topics, including ESPR (Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation), DPP (Digital Product Passport) and SOC (Substances of Concern); the REACH revision, including polymer registration, mixture allocation factors, generic risk assessment and

essential use; microplastics, including SPM (Synthetic Polymeric Microparticles); the ELVR (End-of-Life Vehicles Regulation); and the E.U.'s regulation on preventing plastic pellet losses. His contribution extended as well to test methods and technical documentation. In 2022, he co-drafted a new joint statement by Afera and IVK on the accuracy of test methods.

This combination of strategic thinking and technical detail made him especially valuable. He could move comfortably between high-level regulatory questions and the practical realities affecting manufacturers, suppliers and the wider tape value chain.

A steady voice on regulatory affairs

As Afera's regulatory agenda intensified, Dr. Hessland remained closely engaged. When Afera rebooted its Regulatory Affairs Working Group in 2023, he summed up the value of that forum very clearly: "We as IVK are pleased to share and align our national view on the various regulatory topics with other European tape manufacturers in order to develop common European positions."

He also pointed directly to the scale of the challenge ahead. "Especially the E.U. Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability under the Green Deal and the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) are going to have a huge impact on the adhesive tapes future and business."

Those remarks capture something essential about his contribution. He brought expertise, certainly, but also judgement. He understood where the real pressure points were and why collective European action mattered.



A colleague to the end

Even in more recent moments, Dr. Hessland's warmth came through. After the 1st Afera European Tape Week in Thessaloniki, he described it as "a wonderful conference with really interesting and inspiring lectures." He added: "There have been very interesting people to meet, just like every year. The location is also wonderful. Where the tape industry is concerned, this is the place to be."

That same blend of substance, humour and humanity is unmistakable in the retirement message he recently shared with colleagues. "Retirement is calling — yet the adhesive of great memories will always hold," he wrote. Reflecting on his career, he added: "After 28

years in adhesives, I do not easily part from things that hold together well. But bonding also involves debonding." Retirement, he said, would be his very personal "debonding on command" time.

He also described his work within Afera's TC and various working groups as "a special part of my professional life": "technically demanding, politically interesting, consistently challenging" and "not infrequently enriched with just the right touch of humour that helped us navigate more than one regulatory storm."

That line feels especially apt. It captures both the seriousness of the issues and the way he approached them: engaged, composed and always appreciative of the people around him. In the same note, he thanked colleagues for their commitment, their collegial spirit and their competent support in many a complex or unexpected situation.

Characteristically, his farewell was not quite a full goodbye. Even while formally entering retirement, he noted that he was “not entirely ‘debonded’” and would remain available for consulting projects related to his former fields of work.

With thanks from Afera

Looking back, Dr. Hessland wrote that he does so “with great pleasure and deep appreciation for the time we spent working together,” and wished colleagues continued success, a steady hand in committee work, plenty of energy for the large and small tasks ahead, and enough calm to handle the next unexpected regulatory surprise with grace.

Afera looks back in much the same spirit.

Over many years, Dr. Axel Hessland has been a thoughtful, respected and highly valued contributor to the Association. He has helped connect adhesives and adhesive tapes, national and European perspectives, technical detail and wider strategy. He has brought intelligence, commitment and collegiality to the table, and he has helped strengthen Afera’s work in ways that will last beyond his retirement.

Afera warmly thanks Axel for his long-standing commitment and wishes him a very happy, well-deserved and rewarding retirement.

If you would like to contact Dr. Hessland, his email address is axel.hessland@hessland.eu. For more information about Afera Affiliated Member IVK, visit [here](#).

