

## **An Afera Member on the move: Mikko Rissanen on Afera's new RL recycling webpage, industry collaboration and winning the AWA Leadership Award**

*Interview by Afera Secretary-General Astrid Lejeune | Written by Afera Comms Officer Bathsheba Fulton*

Mikko Rissanen, director of technology at UPM Specialty Papers, has been honoured with the AWA Leadership Award 2025 for his nearly three decades of contributions to the release liner industry. At the same time, he continues his active role in Afera's WS2 Waste Management Workstream, which has just launched a dedicated webpage on release liner recycling ([www.afera.com/adhesive-tapes-sustainability/sustainable-management-of-release-liners](https://afera.com/adhesive-tapes-sustainability/sustainable-management-of-release-liners)). In our interview, Mikko shares his thoughts on liner recycling, industry collaboration, and the future of sustainability in tapes.



In March 2025, Mikko Rissanen, director of technology at UPM Specialty Papers, was honoured with the AWA Annual Release Liner Industry Leadership Award 2025, presented during the AWA Annual Release Liner Summit Conference dinner on March 20 in Chicago, hosted by AWA Alexander Watson Associates and Mondi Group. The recognition celebrates his nearly three decades of contributions to the industry, from pioneering innovations in glassine release liners to leadership roles within Afera and FINAT.

At the same time, Afera's Flagship Sustainability Project – Workstream 2 (WS2), in which Mr. Rissanen plays an active role, has just reached an important milestone with the launch of a dedicated webpage on release liner recycling. This initiative not only raises awareness but also strengthens collaboration between Member Companies and recycling partners such as Soprema

and DMP, reinforcing the industry's collective commitment to sustainability.

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### **WS2 milestone: Release liner recycling hub**

 **Explore Afera's new release liner recycling webpage:**

 <https://afera.com/adhesive-tapes-sustainability/sustainable-management-of-release-liners/>

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We sat down with Mr. Rissanen to explore the goals of WS2, the broader importance of industry collaboration and his reflections on receiving the AWA Award.

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## Afera Flagship Sustainability Project stream on waste management

**Afera Secretary-General Astrid Lejeune:**

*Afera's WS2 has just launched a dedicated webpage on release liner recycling. What do you see as the main goals and impact of this initiative?*



**Mr. Rissanen:** The main challenge with release liner waste has always been collection and bringing it back into the loop. Whether or not liner is legally classified as packaging will have a big impact, because then PPWR requirements could apply. But even without regulation, we know our materials need to be recyclable, with demonstrable end uses at scale. That's why awareness-building is so important—many people still don't realise how feasible it is to recycle glassine. With the right processes, you can remove contaminants and reuse the high-quality fibre in almost anything.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *Do you think many tape manufacturers and converters are unaware of this recyclability?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** There's less confusion than a few years ago, but logistics remain an issue. Liner waste is scattered globally, making collection from smaller users difficult. Combining tape liner with label liner waste could solve this by leveraging economies of scale. We're also discussing [harmonising colours to make recycling easier](#). And of course, even if closed-loop recycling isn't possible, downcycling options remain viable.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *Afera is also strengthening partnerships with recyclers such as Soprema and DMP. From your perspective, how important are these collaborations?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** Very important. At UPM, we're not focused solely on closed-loop recycling—repurposing solutions like insulation materials also have value. The more responsible end-of-life options we can demonstrate, the less likely regulators are to intervene with unfit measures. Collaboration with recyclers and waste management companies helps us improve processes and ensure materials are treated at their highest possible value.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *One of the ongoing challenges is encouraging companies to share their waste management and recycling practices. What do you think will motivate more Afera Members to take part?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** Voluntary participation is always tricky, especially in volatile times when companies are fighting for survival. But in Europe, the regulatory landscape is evolving quickly. Companies will soon be

required to demonstrate progress, so the relevance of these efforts will only increase. In the meantime, Afera provides a strong platform for members to exchange practices and prepare for that shift.

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## Leadership and award



**Ms. Lejeune:** *Congratulations on receiving the AWA Leadership Award this year! What does this recognition mean to you personally and professionally?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** Thank you—it was a complete surprise. It's very rewarding to be recognised as a thought leader for innovations like recycled liners and reactive glassine surfaces. On a personal level, it feels like validation that our focus on the right things has brought real value to the industry. At 52, it's also a good

moment to reflect on my career. This award has made it easier to connect with new contacts and has reinforced existing relationships. It's a real honour to join such a prestigious group of past recipients.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *The award was presented during the 25th Anniversary AWA Release Liner Summit in Chicago. In presenting it to you, AWA President & CEO Corey Reardon described you as “a true gentleman and an exceptional leader,” adding that your passion for collaboration and joint development has been central to your success and that your influence and dedication to the industry are “truly remarkable.” How did it feel to hear such strong words of recognition from your peers?*

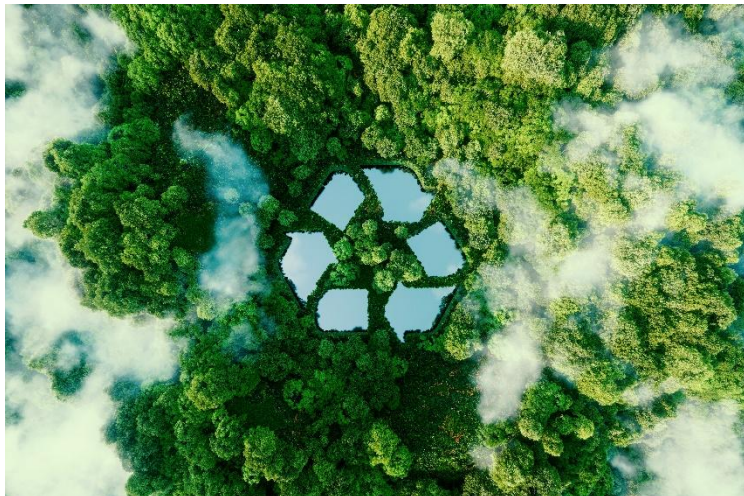
**Mr. Rissanen:** That meant a lot to me. It was humbling but also affirming to hear that the work I've done, often quietly in the background, has made an impact on the industry as a whole.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *You've been with UPM since 1999 and have made significant contributions to release liner innovation. Which accomplishment are you most proud of?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** The development of the patent for our glassine release liner and its activated surface technology for silicone anchorage stands out—perhaps alongside authoring technical papers, too. My journey from R&D engineer to director of technology has also been a path marked by production experience, innovation leadership and involvement in associations like FINAT and Afera.

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## Bridging innovation and sustainability



**Ms. Lejeune:** *Your career shows a balance between technical innovation and broader industry collaboration, which ties directly into sustainability. How do you see technical innovations, like your work with glassine liners, supporting the shift toward circularity?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** For me, innovation and sustainability are inseparable. My work in WS2 has been about improving recyclability and helping the industry advance. Afera has been an excellent platform for this—an active, inclusive group where people are truly engaged.

Compared to other associations, it's been much easier to make progress together. And through my broader involvement in networks like FINAT, Celab, Cepi and 4evergreen, I see how crucial collaboration is to driving innovation.

**Ms. Lejeune:** *Looking ahead, where do you see the release liner and tape industry in the next 5–10 years when it comes to sustainability and waste management?*

**Mr. Rissanen:** If we stay proactive and keep things in our own hands, the future looks strong. Paper-based liners, as a renewable resource, should fare particularly well. Compared to the label sector, the tape industry feels less commoditised and full of opportunities for innovation. Our customers are already expanding into fast-evolving markets like composites. I'm confident we'll see exciting progress in both sustainability and innovation over the coming decade.

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## Leadership in action

Mr. Rissanen's reflections highlight how Afera's WS2 is bridging industry, recyclers and policymakers to advance sustainability in release liner recycling. His recognition with the AWA Leadership Award underscores not only his personal impact but the collective momentum of the industry toward a more sustainable future.



For more information, visit [www.atera.com/adhesive-tapes-sustainability/flagship-sustainability-project](http://www.atera.com/adhesive-tapes-sustainability/flagship-sustainability-project). To join WS2, go to [www.atera.com/register-for-afsp](http://www.atera.com/register-for-afsp).