

Specialty chemicals distributor U.S. Chemicals renews emphasis on the environment and seeks sustainable partners.

Joseph Chang/New York

LARGE MULTINATIONAL corporations from Wal-Mart to Procter & Gamble to DuPont are all embarking on green initiatives and touting their efforts and achievements. But even small to mid-sized enterprises can play their part to make a difference in their communities and the world.

“Businesses have to work in conjunction with the environment,” said Carol Piccaro, president and CEO of specialty chemical distributor U.S. Chemicals, based in New Canaan, Connecticut, in an interview at the New York office of ICIS. “As you prosper in business, it impacts the environment, and we all have to be more aware.”

U.S. Chemicals, a women-owned and operated business with over \$20m in annual sales, is putting more emphasis on choosing environmentally friendly suppliers.

“As a member of the NACD [National Association of Chemical Distributors], we are already vetting our suppliers from all over the world, but we are looking to be even more environmentally conscious with whom we partner,” says Piccaro. “We want to be aware of their green initiatives and as well as their sustainable actions. We want to do business with like-minded people.”

U.S. Chemicals provides specialty chemicals for applications such as paints, inks and coatings textiles cosmetics and personal care flame retardants food and pharmaceutical plastics and rubber and unsaturated polyester resins (UPR) and stabilizers.

KNOCKING ON GREEN DOORS

Piccaro is looking for suppliers with green products and credentials, which will appeal to U.S. Chemicals’ customers. “We are starting to look at renewable, food-grade ingredients such as the ones Tate & Lyle offer.”

UK-based Tate & Lyle is a major player in renewable food and industrial ingredients produced mostly from corn and sugarcane.

U.S. Chemicals views the greening of the consumer and chemical industries as a long-term trend as people become more environmentally conscious.

“The green movement is not a fad or a phase. My kids talk to me about this. Clearly what we do today can and will impact their generation as well as future generations,” Piccaro says. “We can all make a difference in the world.”

And being green makes sense from a business standpoint. “People are tracking environmentally conscious businesses,” she adds. “This is becoming one of the checklists in doing business with suppliers and customers.”

And while the chemical industry is often maligned from an environmental standpoint, Piccaro points out that many green solutions are simply not possible without chemicals. "In activities such as soil remediation, people lose sight of the fact that you need chemicals like caustic soda to rebalance the pH levels and clean the soil," she says.

U.S. Chemicals, which has nine warehouses in the US, one in Ontario, Canada, and another in Barcelona, Spain, offers custom services such as blending, aqueous dispersions, grinding/screening, special packaging and toll manufacturing.

Despite concerns about a slowdown or a recession in the US economy, Piccaro remains optimistic on the company's diversified specialty chemical business.

"Many of our products are used in food and pharmaceutical applications, so they are not impacted as much by the economy," she points out. "Distributors can sustain economic downturns by assisting suppliers with surplus inventory."

And recently, there have been shortages of a number of chemicals and ingredients, including glycerin, methanol and isophthalic acid. "Distributors that can secure these products have an advantage," she says.

HISTORY AND COMMUNITY

U.S. Chemicals has a long and successful history in the chemical distribution business. Founded in 1960 by Piccaro's father, Howard Von Oehsen, the company has grown and thrived by placing an emphasis on relationships and reliability, says Piccaro, who started working at the company 23 years ago.

"Trusted relationships with suppliers and customers is the key reason we've been around all these years," she notes.

Being a people-driven business, U.S. Chemicals aims to create a healthy and flexible work environment for its six full-time and six-part time employees.

"Our people invest a great deal of their personal time working on philanthropic events such as volunteering in soup kitchens, building homes for impoverished families, and raising funds for eradicating diseases," notes Trudi Leddy, a director at U.S. Chemicals.

Local charities that have benefited from this philanthropy include A Better Chance, Americares, Darien Community Fund, Literacy Volunteers, and Walks for ALS and Breast Cancer.

"We encourage community activities, but the spark in our people is inherently there," she says. And in the office, everyone does their part as part of the green team. "We recycle paper and plastic, try not to print emails and use energy-efficient light bulbs," notes Leddy.

Piccaro has even secured a spot on the wait list for the pint-sized, high-efficiency Smart car for local company business