Substitution workshops: lessons from the antifouling workshop 5 October 2018

Jochem van der Waals (jochem.vander.waals@minienm.nl), Ronald Flipphi (ronald.flipphi@minienm.nl)

Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, the Netherlands

1 Introduction

The Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water management hosted a workshop about safe and sustainable antifouling for recreational craft on 5 October 2018. The workshop is an example of a supply-chain workshop about substitution of hazardous chemicals. This note summarizes some lessons for the organisation of such workshops. It is based on feedback from members of the organisation team, which consisted of:

- the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, host of the workshop;
- the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, which facilitated the workshop and the preparation process;
- HISWA Holland Marine Industry, co-organiser to identify and contact key participants;
- Waterrecreatie Nederland (Waterways Netherlands), co-organiser to identify and contact key participants and also assigned with logistic tasks for organisation of the workshop;
- RIVM (Dutch National Institute of Public Health and the Environment), which gave expert input on the content;
- European Chemicals Agency, consulted to connect to ECHA's substitution strategy and to assist with communication.

2 The antifouling workshop

The need for safer, more sustainable antifouling alternatives in the recreational boating sector has spurred a number of innovations in recent years. However, despite the availability of a variety of alternatives, markets have been slow to adopt these new technologies.

The goals of the workshop were to:

- clarify the reasons for the slow adoption of safer alternatives to conventional antifouling paints in the recreational boat market;
- identify the needs that if addressed could advance broader adoption of safer, sustainable antifouling choices.

The organisers brought together over 80 stakeholders across the value chain of antifouling technologies for use in recreational boating on 5 October 2018 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The workshop was attended by providers of copper-based anti-fouling paints, providers of alternative technologies, representatives of boat owners, marinas, authorities, research institutes and others.

A report from the workshop can be found here:
https://echa.europa.eu/substitution-news-and-activities/events2018

In general, reactions from stakeholders to the workshop were positive. The open discussion has increased attention to the issue and support for follow-up actions.

3 Recommendations

Based on experiences in the project team, the following recommendations can be made for the organisation of supply chain substitution workshops:

1. Define precisely the goals of the workshop and communicate them clearly to participants

Ideally, the substitution workshop should focus on:

- presenting and discussing the existing and emerging alternatives to conventional hazardous products, and;
- identifying the barriers for adoption of safer alternatives and defining next steps to overcome them.

It should be made clear in advance to all participants that the workshop is not designed to discuss the pertinence of replacing conventional products or risk mitigation aspects of these products.

2. Have a clear designation of roles and responsibilities in the organisation team

When multiple organisations are involved in planning a meeting, clear designation of who is in charge of what aspects of that effort – recruitment, agenda, logistics, administration – is clearly needed. In this case, the Ministry was host of the workshop and had overall responsibility, the University of Massachusetts Lowell was responsible for facilitation and coordinating the preparation process, Waterways Netherlands had responsibility for logistical organisation and approaching key stakeholders and RIVM was responsible for background information and some general communication.

Involvement of multiple organisations in the preparation means that coordination can be time-consuming. At the same time, they provide a lot of knowledge and their involvement also gives a good foundation for follow-up actions.

3. Start early

Preparations for this workshop started 6 months before the event and this early start was needed to identify and commit stakeholders to the process. Some members of the organisation team considered that an extra month to two months would be ideal to have (even) more time for the necessary planning, outreach, and background material preparation.

4. Invest in identification and representation of participants

It is essential to be clear on critical invitees and target them strategically from the outset; in this case a range of different types of actors in the supply chain (conventional anti-fouling paints manufacturers/suppliers, providers of alternative technologies, representatives of boat owners, marinas, authorities, research institutes and others). Gathering in the same event actors across a supply chain that do not usually interact directly was a key success factor, allowing input to the discussions from different points of view.

The inclusion of organisations with a strong network in the organising team helped to identify stakeholders. For instance, a range of suppliers of alternative products were contacted by Waterways Netherlands beforehand to gain commitment for participation, and also to understand their needs and concerns to be prepared for the discussions at the workshop.

The end-users (private boat owners) themselves were, however, difficult to reach and represented only indirectly through marinas and boating associations. Also the retail sector was under-represented.

5. Make relevant studies accessible

The event was supported by background reports about the state of the art of alternatives (from RIVM and Northwest Green Chemistry). Although the reports themselves were not actively circulated with the participants in advance, preliminary info was made available in a thought-starter document. This document, along with presentations at the workshop, provided useful background for participants.

6. Think of next steps before the workshop

It is very useful to develop ideas for possible next steps already (long) before the workshop. In this case, an important idea was to engage in a collaborative programme to test performance of the alternatives compared to the conventional products. This testing programme would make it possible for end-users to have objective information about this performance, which at the workshop emerged as a key issue. This need was raised again and again during the workshop. The workshop also affirmed the importance of simple information tuned to boat yards, boat owners and marinas.

7. Connect user needs, alternatives, barriers and actions in the workshop format

The programme followed a format with sequential steps, which can be used for any substitution challenge:

- discussion of the innovation challenge from several stakeholder viewpoints;
- state of play of alternatives (what do we know about performance and environmental aspects?);
- performance needs from the end-user perspective;
- discussion about next steps needed in terms of innovation and/or adoption of alternatives;
- conclusions and follow-up.

This format allows the discussion to focus on user needs, to connect those to the available alternatives and then to use this information for discussion about actions that break down barriers to implement the alternatives.

8. Leave enough room for interaction with participants and group discussions

The time for the workshop was tight and some participants noted that more discussion time would have been helpful. Such discussion time could help build new understandings and collaborative partnerships. This could possibly be addressed by having less panel discussions.
People who know each other tend to choose a place next to each other. Ensure to mix people with different backgrounds when having discussions in groups.

9. Focus discussion on next steps, not on risks of chemicals to be replaced nor on advertising specific alternatives

The starting point for the substitution workshops is the need for innovation and adoption of safer, more sustainable alternatives for a particular chemical function. By doing this, the focus can be on innovation in a range of substitutes rather than a focus on risks of specific incumbent chemicals. Companies that deliver the products containing hazardous chemicals also need to be involved. There is no clear line between providers of alternatives and of existing products, because some of these companies may supply

both and/or may see new roles in a new situation. Although at the start of the workshop it was made clear that discussion was to focus on next steps in terms of innovation and adoption of alternatives, at some points (or some tables) discussion took place on whether or not substitution of the copper-based paints was needed at all, and whether copper was as harmful as was being assumed. It takes very strong facilitation to keep steering discussion in the right direction in such situations.

Another point of attention is that some suppliers of alternatives, when invited in e.g. a panel discussion, are inclined to advertise their product, even if they are explicitly instructed not to do so and are asked to focus on next steps at a more general level. One solution could be not to invite them to present something but rather to ask them specific questions in a particular discussion.

10. Include networking options in the programme

A debate about policy measures is not always interesting for companies, and a workshop can be a good opportunity for suppliers and potential clients to meet and network. In our case this was done with a long networking lunch where alternatives providers could present their materials (flyers, samples etc). This was appreciated, as they were given the opportunity to discuss their product with other stakeholders. However, expectations in terms of meeting new clients should not be raised to high.

11. Use an independent facilitator

To have an independent party moderating the meeting with clear technical knowledge about substitution or the specific chemical function was considered a key element in the context of diverging interest and viewpoints.

12. Ensure/support commitment from key stakeholder(s) on follow-up

The organiser of the workshop should ensure or support commitment from key stakeholder(s) for leading the implementation of the next steps identified at the workshop. This key stakeholder can be a public authority, a group of companies, an industry association, etc.
In the case of the antifouling workshop, the role of the Ministry taking the lead on this topic and to show commitment, also at the start and closure of the workshop, was appreciated by participants.

13. Think about working language

The language used in the antifouling workshop was English, since this made it possible to involve international players and experts (although most participants were Dutch). The presence of an US facilitator made it easier to bring in expertise from North America in the event, so in fact the state of the art of alternatives could be assessed at global level. For some participants representing end-users (such as marina owners) discussions were difficult to follow. Pros and cons of using English or the national language(s) should be considered case-by-case.