

'SOMEONE ELSE' HAS TO BE US!

A new non-profit group, including Whole Foods and several vendors, aims to work together to hasten the spread of natural refrigerants.

BY KELLY WITMAN

A few weeks ago, a group of environmental leaders in supermarket refrigeration formed a new non-profit group called the North American Sustainable Refrigeration Council.

Its purpose is to bring together all supermarket industry stakeholder groups that believe natural refrigerants are key to eliminating the industry's contribution to the major environmental problems caused by refrigerant emissions: harm to the ozone layer and global warming. Their goal is to work together to overcome the hurdles that stand in the way of broader adoption of natural refrigerants.

The organizations represented on the board of directors of the non-profit include supermarket end-users, service contractors, equipment manufacturers, and component manufacturers. Membership in the non-profit is open to businesses in all of those sectors.

FOCUS ON NATURAL

While the group is in favor of all refrigerants that protect the ozone layer and reduce the global warming impact of refrigeration, the members will focus on natural refrigerants. Why? The answer lies in the paradigm shift of the past five years in how our industry moves from one generation of refrigerants to the next.

In the past, chemical manufacturers like Honeywell and DuPont (now called Chemours) led the charge toward each new generation of environmentally-friendlier refrigerants, because they were the ones that developed and held the patents on those refrigerants. It was in their interest to push for each generation's wider adoption and quick uptake.

But chemical manufacturers can't patent refrigerants like carbon dioxide and ammonia, and because they can't make money on naturals, they have little business interest in their acceptance. Thus, the group that had historically led the push for government approval for new refrigerants, the adoption of new codes, service technician training,



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and stakeholder education did not step up to the plate on behalf of the naturals. And why would they? They are in business to make a profit, and there is nothing wrong with them championing the solutions that are in their own business interest, as they are doing with the lower GWP HFO blends that they recently brought onto the market.

However, that means that someone else has to go to bat for the naturals. And this reliance on "someone else" is the key to the slow uptake of naturals. Companies and people interested in natural refrigerants have all been discussing the hurdles that need to be overcome for years. They sit at conferences, they read and write articles, and they discuss late into the night all of the things that "someone" needs to do (yes, I do include myself in that group). We all have all the answers to all the problems, but as long as everyone is waiting for someone else to act, nothing gets done.

This reliance on someone else is not only due to passing the buck. Understandably, no one company wants to take on the cost and time burden to single-handedly overcome the hurdles that face natural refrigerants — not when their competitors will benefit from those solutions just as much as they will.

To move forward, we need everyone to be part of the solution. We need competitors to work together, and we need all the different types of companies that do business with naturals to work together. End-users need to share information with other end-users. Equipment manufacturers that compete with each other in this space need to work together where they have common interests. Service contractors need to work together to overcome the hurdles they face in using natural refrigerants. But

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perhaps most important, end-users and equipment manufacturers and service contractors all need

to work together and acknowledge that all of the hurdles they face are interconnected.

IT'S EVERYONE'S JOB

The challenges and the work involved in setting up a new non-profit is not to be underestimated. So kudos to Whole Foods Market, True Manufacturing, Carter Retail Equipment, Hillphoenix, Danfoss, Parker Hannifin, and Source Refrigeration for stepping up and making the North American Sustainable Refrigeration Council happen. They all recognized that, in the end, "someone else" has to be us, if we want to make progress for the environment. ■

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