

2026 SOCMA Sustainability & Safety Workshop

Key Takeaways & Practical Applications

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Hosted by Rockwell Automation

Purpose of This Document

This summary highlights the most practical, tangible takeaways and actions from the 2026 Sustainability & Safety Workshop. It is designed to help attendees translate workshop discussions into real-world application within their facilities.

Workshop Overview

SOCMA's 2026 workshop brought together sustainability and safety into one integrated program recognizing that many EHS professionals are wearing multiple hats and balancing both priorities daily.

The agenda combined:

- Facility tours and real-world demonstrations
 - Regulatory and customer expectation updates
 - Hands-on working sessions
 - Peer-driven discussions and case studies
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Key Takeaways and What They Mean in Practice

1. Sustainability is Increasingly Customer-Driven—and Expectations Are Becoming More Detailed

A central theme throughout the workshop, and reinforced strongly during the closing panel, is that sustainability is no longer driven solely by internal goals or regulatory compliance. Instead, customers are increasingly shaping the direction, pace, and level of detail required.

However, panelists emphasized that this shift is not uniform across all industries or customer segments. For some companies, sustainability expectations may still be relatively basic, such as providing an EcoVadis score or completing a supplier questionnaire. For others, particularly those operating in global or consumer-facing markets, expectations are becoming far more detailed and technical.

These evolving requests include:

- Product-level data such as life cycle assessments (LCA) and product carbon footprints (PCF)
- More comprehensive Scope 3 emissions reporting
- Increased demand for supplier-level sustainability data and verification

As one panelist noted, the direction is clear: companies are moving toward “proof, not promises” where claims must be supported by credible, documented data.

Practical Application:

Rather than reacting to each request individually, companies should begin building a standardized sustainability response package. This should include key policies, performance metrics, certifications, and emissions data that can be reused across customers. Starting small and building over time is critical, focus first on what is most requested, and expand capabilities as needed.

2. Start with What You Already Have—Then Build Strategically

Another important takeaway is that many companies are already making meaningful progress on sustainability, even if they do not formally label it as such. Operational improvements, cost reduction initiatives, waste minimization efforts, and energy efficiency projects often align naturally with sustainability goals.

Panelists highlighted that in many cases, companies do not need to reinvent their approach, they simply need to recognize, document, and communicate the work they are already doing.

Additionally, real-world examples showed how companies have leveraged existing challenges such as rising costs or operational disruptions to drive improvements that also deliver sustainability benefits. The key is ensuring that these efforts are sustained over time, rather than being treated as one-off responses.

Practical Application:

Conduct an internal review to identify existing practices that support sustainability objectives. Map these efforts to common frameworks such as EcoVadis or customer scorecards. Focus on improving documentation, consistency, and accessibility of information, rather than building entirely new systems.

3. Sustainability Must Be Integrated with Business Strategy to Be Sustainable

A major shift highlighted during the closing panel is the transition from sustainability as a compliance requirement or “license to operate” to a more integrated concept of “profitable sustainability.”

Panelists emphasized that sustainability initiatives are more effective and resilient when they are tied directly to business performance, cost efficiency, and operational value.

Examples discussed included:

- Locating operations closer to feedstocks or markets to reduce both cost and emissions
- Improving product life cycles through better use of by-products
- Investing in technologies that enhance both environmental performance and margins

In an environment shaped by economic pressure, geopolitical uncertainty, and evolving regulations, sustainability efforts must demonstrate clear business value to remain a priority.

Practical Application:

Shift the conversation internally from “sustainability for compliance” to “sustainability for performance.” Identify initiatives that deliver both environmental and financial benefits. This alignment helps ensure long-term commitment, even during periods of market volatility.

4. Internal Alignment and Accountability Are Critical to Execution

A recurring challenge discussed throughout the workshop is the disconnect between sustainability efforts and other parts of the organization particularly commercial and operational teams.

In many cases, customer sustainability requests are handled by sales or commercial personnel who may not have full visibility into company capabilities or limitations. This can lead to inconsistent messaging or missed opportunities to highlight strengths.

The closing panel reinforced that successful companies are addressing this by embedding sustainability into the broader organization, rather than isolating it within a single function. Some are even incorporating sustainability metrics into employee performance goals and incentives, ensuring accountability across the business.

Practical Application:

Break down internal silos by aligning EHS, sustainability, operations, and commercial teams. Provide training and clear guidance so that all employees understand how sustainability connects to their roles. Consider incorporating sustainability-related metrics into performance evaluations to drive ownership and accountability.

5. Practical Implementation and Continuous Improvement Matter More Than Perfection

Throughout the workshop, there was a strong emphasis on practicality. Companies at all stages of their sustainability journey shared their experiences, reinforcing that progress is often incremental and iterative.

Panelists stressed the importance of maintaining discipline in data tracking, transparency, and long-term commitment, even as regulatory and market conditions continue to evolve.

Rather than waiting for perfect systems or complete data, companies should focus on building repeatable, scalable processes that can improve over time.

Practical Application:

Start with what is feasible today. Establish baseline metrics such as Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions—and gradually expand into more complex areas like Scope 3 and product-level analysis. Focus on consistency and improvement rather than perfection.

6. Communication is a Critical Capability for Both Sustainability and Safety

The final day of the workshop highlighted the importance of communication as a core capability not just for external messaging, but for internal alignment and risk management.

Sessions focused on how organizations communicate under pressure, engage with stakeholders, and build trust with communities. This is especially important in the specialty chemical industry, where safety and environmental performance are closely scrutinized.

Effective communication requires clarity, consistency, and preparation. Organizations must be ready to explain their actions, respond to concerns, and engage stakeholders in a meaningful way.

Practical Application:

Develop structured communication strategies that include stakeholder mapping, messaging frameworks, and crisis response planning. Practice these scenarios in advance to build confidence and ensure readiness.

Key Tools and Deliverables from the Workshop

Throughout the sessions, several practical tools emerged that companies can begin implementing immediately:

- **Supplier Sustainability Response Package**

A standardized set of documents and data that can be used to respond to customer sustainability requests efficiently. This may include policies, KPIs, certifications, and emissions data.

- **GHG Tracking Framework**

A step-by-step approach to begin measuring and managing emissions, starting with available data and expanding over time.

- **Sustainability Project Pipeline**

A structured way to identify, prioritize, and track sustainability initiatives based on impact, feasibility, and business value.

- **Internal Communication Toolkit**

Templates and guidance to help align messaging across teams and ensure consistent communication with external stakeholders.

Emerging Trends to Watch

The workshop also highlighted several trends that are shaping the future of sustainability in the specialty chemical industry:

- Increased focus on product-level sustainability data (PCF, LCA)
- Growing demand for supply chain transparency and verification
- Continued importance of EcoVadis and customer-driven assessments
- Greater emphasis on integrating sustainability into business performance
- Stronger alignment between safety, sustainability, and operational excellence

These trends reinforce the importance of building flexible, scalable systems that can adapt as expectations continue to evolve.

Recommended Next Steps

To build on the momentum from the workshop, attendees are encouraged to take immediate, practical actions, such as:

- Developing a standardized sustainability response package

- Aligning internal teams on sustainability priorities and messaging
- Initiating or strengthening greenhouse gas tracking efforts
- Identifying operational projects that deliver both cost and sustainability benefits
- Embedding sustainability into performance metrics and accountability structures

Closing Thoughts

The 2026 Sustainability & Safety Workshop reinforced a critical shift: sustainability is no longer a separate initiative it is becoming a core component of how businesses operate, compete, and grow.

The closing panel made it clear that the companies best positioned for the future will be those that:

- Stay adaptable in a changing landscape
- Focus on practical, scalable solutions
- Integrate sustainability into business strategy
- And commit to continuous improvement

Progress does not require perfection but it does require discipline, alignment, and action.

We extend our sincere thanks to all attendees, speakers, sponsors, and our host, Rockwell Automation, for making this event a success.