

# Highest ethical values: the only acceptable goal

We speak to María Jesús Almenar Martin, Head of Group SHE&Q at Azelis, about the company's commitment to maintaining the highest possible values in sustainability and social responsibility.



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**Azelis** was recently awarded Gold rating from **EcoVadis**, a testimony to the company's great efforts in corporate social responsibility (CSR). *Chemicals Knowledge* spoke to María Jesús Almenar Martin, Head of Group SHE&Q at Azelis, who also heads Azelis' CSR efforts, to discover more about the values driving the company's achievements in CSR.

## Firstly, congratulations on your EcoVadis Gold rating! Can you explain what this means to Azelis?

Thank you! The **EcoVadis** Gold rating very much reflects how we want to be seen: as a sustainable, reliable, compliant supplier to the industries we serve. Getting the Gold rating means that we are part of the top 1% distributors assessed by **EcoVadis**. It acknowledges that we are a company who does the things right and has the right processes in place which are sustainable and transparent.

## Where did Azelis' focus on CSR begin?

**Azelis** has long been committed to Responsible Care & Responsible Distribution. These are voluntary initiatives for the continuous improvement of HSE (Health, Safety & Environment) standards. However, being a global distributor, we needed a broader programme that could help us with the increasing challenges in the entire supply chain. CSR helped us to further develop our labour and fair-operating practices, and install respect towards human rights, and the environment.

## How would you summarize Azelis' company values?

Our values are embedded in everything we do and form the solid foundation of our relationships with customers, principals, suppliers and other stakeholders. We listen to our people on the ground, we provide space and opportunity for all good initiatives, and we stimulate innovation and ambition.

Servicing a wide array of industries, we try to be the best local champion for each one of them. This is only possible through focussed

and dedicated people, who have industry qualifications and experience, as they know the local markets best. Staying abreast of the latest market trends, serving on various industry bodies, sharing knowledge internally and externally alike are only some of the ways that enable that.

## Are these values part of your employees' daily lives?

The **Azelis** charity fund, *Because giving back matters*, was set up in 2018. This fund allows us to give back, as a company and as a community. Starting last year and continuing every year forward, **Azelis** will donate approximately €20,000 to a charitable cause – our employees choose a global charity that is close to their hearts. We also fully embrace local charity initiatives, such as local teams visiting children's care centres to help out.

The entrepreneurial mindset of the **Azelis** community stimulated the creation of two important learning initiatives this year: the **Azelis** University (for the Americas region) and the Sales Academy (for the EMEA region). Both initiatives focus on stimulating learning, development and entrepreneurship.

We also organise a yearly knowledge review on ethical business conduct and compliance,

to make sure everyone understands our high ethical standards and is able to represent these while doing business.

## I understand you participate in the United Nations Global Compact initiative – can you tell us more about that?

The UN Global Compact initiative is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative and a call to companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and take actions that advance societal goals.

When the UN Global Compact defined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this constituted a huge paradigm shift. It wasn't only governments anymore who had a role to play in solving some of the world's most burning problems, it was now companies too. All those issues that SDGs tackle are interdependent, can't be solve in isolation, but they also can't be solved through isolated actions either – partnerships are key.

As a signatory, we report annually on our progress towards the set CSR goals. **Azelis** also supports the UN strategy of achieving the

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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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UN 17 SDGs by 2030. We have identified the SDGs we can influence as a company and as a community, and we implement them through:

- Enabling employee development
- Promoting employee well-being
- Ensuring equal opportunity and diversity
- Reducing energy consumption while maximizing renewable energies sources
- Reducing waste while maximizing recycling
- Preventing environmental incidents
- Practicing responsible procurement
- Using fair operating practices
- Participating in the development of society.

## I have heard you talk about your 'sustainable procurement policy' – what do you mean by this?

This means the adoption and integration of CSR principles into procurement of products and services within the supply chain. We ask our principals and suppliers to adhere to local legal regulations or internationally recognised standards with regards to labour practices, environment protection and fair operation practices.

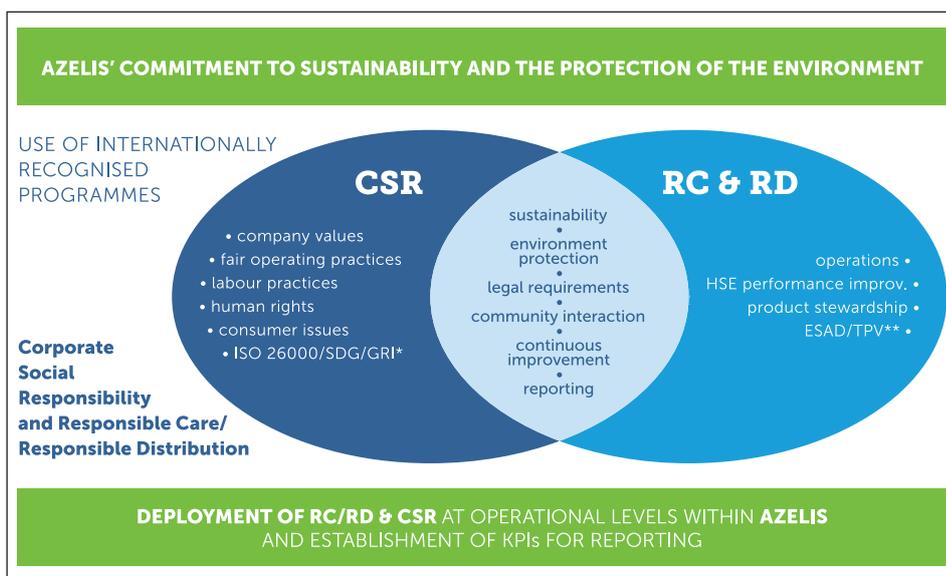
As a global distributor, **Azelis** has principals and suppliers all over the world, so we need to make sure that our suppliers are engaged in similar CSR strategies as ours. We have the obligation to verify that these commitments are respected at all times and we do this through regular assessments.

## At the other end of the chain, how do you help your customers to be more sustainable and socially responsible?

To support our customers in being more sustainable and socially responsible themselves is an important ambition of ours and we do this in various ways.

Through our sustainable procurement policy, **Azelis** has a due diligence process that assesses our partners, making sure that these suppliers and the products we offer on their behalf come from sustainable and socially responsible partners.

A lot of our daily work is about developing formulations and innovative solutions in our application labs. By combining the raw materials of our principals in a new way, we can develop products that create added value for our customers. Many of our formulation efforts are focused on bringing solutions to environmental challenges, and we're proud to say that several of these formulations



### Azelis' commitment to sustainability and the protection of the environment

\*SDG: Sustainable Development Goals - GRI: Global Reporting Initiative

\*\* SAD/TPV: RC Third Party Verification scheme

have been acknowledged with important innovation awards. Our UK Personal Care lab team recently created an all-natural powdered soap that requires a minimum amount of water to activate its cleaning and hydrating characteristics. Our Homecare & Industrial Cleaning lab team also shows expertise in creating sustainable products. Some of their latest innovations were a neutral, sustainably-derived degreaser and a novel sprayable oven cleaner formulated without caustic soda to reduce CLP labelling and avoid corrosive labelling. We see the same eagerness to create green solutions in our other market segments.

### Is there a particular programme that you are especially proud of?

It's only been a year since we've rolled out our CSR programme and we are still in the early stages of measuring our performance, but we are very proud that our CSR efforts have been awarded with the Gold rating of **EcoVadis**. It's a confirmation that we are on the right track and a motivation to keep going in this direction.

We also see a higher awareness around CSR within our **Azelis** community, which we are very proud of, going from local teams organizing teambuilding events with a CSR purpose at its core, to sales managers urging for an internationally developed CSR programme and now being its biggest ambassadors, to local charity initiatives. As any external action starts with internal awareness and acceptance, we are very pleased to see how CSR has been embraced in the organization. This is particularly critical in such early stages of a journey, like the one where we are now.

### What's next for Azelis CSR?

Since the launch of our CSR programme, our CSR performance has evolved and we are continuously finding the best ways to measure our performance and further develop our commitments. We want to be the reference for sustainability in our business, and set the standards for sustainability in the chemical distribution. The **EcoVadis** Gold rating was not only a recognition – it has set expectations higher. We have to make sure we stay focussed, and we keep doing what we have been doing – acting responsibly towards all our stakeholders, day in, day out.

### Do you have any advice for other companies in the speciality chemicals industry, trying to reduce their impact on our world?

I would definitely recommend all businesses to consider CSR as an essential asset that guarantees the future of the chemical industry. CSR goes beyond legal, economic or societal requirements and obligations; companies also have a moral responsibility to act on for the consumers they serve. Embracing the principles and ambitions of CSR and initiatives such as the UN Global Compact can help companies prepare for the future.

### Interview with:

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