

# Defending Fragrance in a Transparent World

Highlights from the first annual meeting of the International Fragrance Association North America

**B**ill Troy (Firmenich) opened the first annual meeting of the International Fragrance Association, North America (IFRA NA; [www.ifraorg.org](http://www.ifraorg.org)), which underscored a year of big organizational changes in response to increased regulatory and nongovernmental organization (NGO) pressure around the world. Noting the industry's core principle of secrecy, Troy noted that fragrance remains in the "bull's-eye" of environmental and anti-chemical activists. In order to be proactive, he explained that IFRA has engaged with NGOs in an effort to counteract misunderstandings and seek common ground.

Jennifer Abril, IFRA NA's executive director, echoed Troy's observation that much of the fragrance industry's sustainability is pegged to intellectual property protections. This means that the fragrance industry is disproportionately affected by changes in chemical-related legislation, she argued. And so IFRA NA's mission of safeguarding industry unity remains crucial.

On a more positive note, the meeting served as the US debut of IFRA's new president, Pierre Sivac. Comparing fragrance to other industries, Sivac noted the marked passion held by perfumery professionals: "You live the products you develop." He added, "This is a blend of art and creation and technical expertise. That gives this industry a very broad reach with the customers, with the consumer and with society at large. It's a very special industry." This level of passion and expertise, he said, has led to highly sophisticated product development and a high level of dedication among industry stakeholders. And, he concluded, "Reorganizing the industry [under the new IFRA global framework] is something that is offensive and not reactive. In this sense, you've set the right pace."

Wrapping up the morning with a broader view from outside the industry, Greg Conko (Competitive Enterprise Institute) discussed the threat posed by the Precautionary Principle. Pointing out the false dichotomy of natural vs synthetic chemicals, Conko explained, "Regardless of origin, it's the dose that makes the poison ... The fact of the matter is that everything around us, including us, is made up of chemicals." Despite this, chemophobia—



Jennifer Abril (IFRA NA).



Robert Bedoukian (Bedoukian Research).



Greg Conko (Competitive Enterprise Institute).

## New IFRA NA President, Board

**Kim Bleimann**, chairman and CEO of **Berje Inc.**, has assumed the presidency and chairmanship of the board of the **International Fragrance Association North America (IFRA NA)**. He has been a member of the former **Fragrance Materials Association** board since 2008. Additionally, those included on the 2011 IFRA NA board of directors include **Robert Amaducci**, Flaroma; **Robert Bedoukian**, Bedoukian Research; **David Ellison**, IFF; **Edward Gotch**, Emerald Kalama Chemical, LLC; **James Heinz**, Bell Flavors & Fragrances; **Theodore Kesten**, Belmay; **Fred Kritzer**, Symrise; **Peter Lombardo**, Robertet; **Michel Mane**, Mane; **Karen Manheimer**, Kerry; **Richard Pisano, Jr.**, Citrus and Allied Essences Ltd.; **Steve Tanner**, Arylessence; **Sean Traynor**, Takasago; **William Troy**, Firmenich; **John Vernieri**, Givaudan; and **Michael Wimberly**, Renessenz.



Bill Troy (Firmenich), center, was honored for his years of service to IFRA and FMA by incoming IFRA North America president Kim Bleimann (Berje), left, and IFRA North America executive director Jennifer Abril.



Stephen Manheimer (Kerry Ingredients & Flavours) and Gary Zak (Global Essence).



On the first anniversary of the founding of IFRA North America, the industry gathered to consider the potential ramifications of increased transparency in relation to confidential business information.



Pat Halle (Ungerer & Co.) and Karen Manheimer (Kerry Ingredients & Flavours).



Jill Costa (Bell Flavors & Fragrances) and Gary Friars (drom).

particularly surrounding synthetic chemicals—poses an ongoing consumer relations challenge for the fragrance industry. In part this is due to the fact that the days of a science-based outlook from government has come to an end—an outlook that permeates both major political parties in the United States. The environmental movement has been frustrated in its attempts to clearly connect consumer product chemicals with consumer harm, Conko said. When faced with a dearth of evidence, the environmental movement simply “goes back to the drawing board” to assess strategy and foment a new rationale of attack, rather than becoming convinced that the materials in question are safe.

This new confluence of movements has led to a growing embrace of the Precautionary Principle, which in effect presumes chemicals as unsafe until proven otherwise—no matter the level of probable harm. The Principle is stated variously by numerous NGOs. For example, Women’s Health Matters ([www.womenshealthmatters.ca](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca)) defines it as: “When there is an activity or product that could threaten human health or the environment, precaution



Dave Soltis (Vigon) and Fred Kritzer (Symrise).



*Florentina Cimpian (Charkit Chemical Corp.), Katrina Neale (Global Essence), Alain Frix (Renessenz), Kim Bleimann (Berje) and Michael Boudjouk (Medallion International).*



*Steve Somers (Vigon), Izzy Heller (Bedoukian), Dave Soltis (Vigon), Rich Winter (Symrise) and Jeff Milton (Vigon).*

should be taken, even before there is scientific proof that the activity or product is harmful.” The vagueness of this type of statement, coupled with the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition, creates vast ambiguities, said Conko. The quest to eliminate all possible harm in the world is an “impossible” standard, not to mention the arbitrariness and open-endedness built into the concept. Conko explained that the chemical/fragrance industry is at a disadvantage in a world without standardized regulatory frameworks. And, when it produces evidence of ingredient safety, that data will automatically be discounted for bias. “You’re in no-man’s-land where arbitrariness rules the day,” Conko noted.

Focusing on narrow risks in particular classes of chemicals allows the regulatory apparatus to overlook the advantages of chemicals and technologies. To illustrate, Conko briefly outlined the differences between Type 1 and Type 2 regulatory errors. Error Type 1 in effect mistakenly allows the commercialization of a harmful material or technology, thus victimizing consumers. Error Type 2, meanwhile, describes a scenario in which a perfectly safe material or technology is disallowed by regulators on presumed safety grounds—despite that it is in reality perfectly safe. Type 1 errors are self-correcting: victims are identified and the harmful material is removed from the marketplace/environment. Type 2 errors are not, since disallowing commercialization of the material or technology effectively eliminates future discovery to the contrary—it is impossible to prove a negative.

Environmental activists universally skew to Type 1 thinking. This can potentially keep safe ingredients and technologies off the market, inadvertently making the world less safe. This “invitation to arbitrariness” means that producers have no idea how to proceed and can find themselves to be subjected to uneven fields of competition. For example, in the 1990s the European Union banned US and Canadian beef containing hormones and other growth promoters—despite broad research in favor of their safety for consumers. Oddly, the European Union did not ban the use of such materials in pork products—a market in which its producers are competitive. Such uneven application of the Precautionary Principle shows the danger of the philosophy. The risks are real. In the last 10 years, Denmark banned sale of Kellogg’s

Corn Flakes cereal and Ocean Spray flavored drink due to vitamin enrichment. France tried to ban Red Bull due to caffeine levels. “The precautionary principle allows regulators to do, essentially, whatever they want,” Conko concluded. It is crucial to have rational process guided by sound science, Conko said in closing. This will allow industry to know exactly what it will take to launch safe, approved products. Pursuing such policies, he added, will allow industries to recast themselves in a paradigm in which manufacturers are villains, consumers are victims and environmentalists are heroes.

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