

BCGA Annual Conference

### **A Year of Change – good for all concerned**

A large gathering of gas and equipment companies attended the Annual BCGA Conference in Leeds. **Gasworld** reports on the events for the day.

With industrial gas organisations such as IOMA, EIGA, AIGA and JIGA paving the way for technical and safety improvements in our industry and working on global harmonisation, the work of national gas associations is often under-rated and certainly efforts under-estimated. Attending the BCGA conference, it is clear that the larger regional organisations truly benefit from the work done by domestic gas associations such as BCGA and the people who work on the technical and safety committees.

The conference was opened by the President, Richard Gearing of BOC, who briefly explained that there had been considerable change in the gases business in 2006 in the UK, with BOC being acquired by the Linde Group, that more change was necessary (regulated – sale of Linde Gas UK) and that the BCGA had undergone some significant change itself. He underlined the importance of the Technical & Safety Committees (TSC's) and the work they do to maintain and improve the safety record within our industry and to liaise with other organisations within the UK.

Richard Gearing handed over to Doug Thornton, who himself is part of that change mentioned within the BCGA. Doug is the new Director of the Association and this was the first annual gases conference he had organised. He described the need to move from the old office in Wallingford (and leave the resident ghost!) and to outsource several of the administration functions to allow the real work of the organisation to happen. The high attendance of this year's event already shows the benefits of the new organisation and that Doug Thornton means business in producing further change in the way the BCGA operates.

The morning session included reports from some of the technical committees and the importance of local focus on international issues and standards. It was also clear that international gas associations have to work with major end-user associations (such as food, medical etc.) so that standards are fairly communicated across industries and are possible to achieve.

Following the report back from the TSC's, the first guest speaker - Mr Ted Richards, gave a presentation on the impact of REACH would have on the European chemicals business in which industrial gases is covered. There was no doubt that companies had to take action to ensure that chemicals were registered properly and that distributors or producers outside of Europe, that wish to sell into Europe, will have to comply. This appears to be a costly and bureaucratic exercise but is necessary. In some ways, REACH will have little impact on the industrial gases business as air gases and others that occur naturally are exempt but other gases will have to be registered. *[Note: gasworld believes that this is a theme that needs more attention and will work with the BCGA to provide an article on the true impact REACH will have on the industrial gases business].*

The afternoon session was cleverly structured to provide a lighter style in presentation but with clear and important messages. UK Skills, a presentation by Grahame Hall of Lifelong Learning Network was worried about the disappearing manufacturing skills from the UK market and the lack of importance companies have on engineering and manufacturing skills – that may result in further erosion in the manufacturing base within the country.

There was a presentation on safety and our behaviour towards safety. This needs to be further enforced in the workplace to ensure safety records are maintained or improved.

Finally, the last two speakers were motivational speakers that truly livened up what is commonly known as the “grave-yard” spot of the afternoon. The aim of this was to help focus individual’s energy on motivating staff and others around them to enhance the company’s opportunities. Both Paul McGee and Chris Howe certainly brought some valuable thoughts to the subject in a light-hearted way.

The conference ended with an entertaining Annual Dinner and a special presentation to Dr Clive Morton who is retiring from the BCGA and from BOC and who has been a valuable contributor to the TSC’s in the past 15 years.

The evidence of the attendance and the enthusiasm people have in our industry at the present time should mean an even higher demand for places next years conference. More details of the BCGA and the conference can be found on [www.BCGA.co.uk](http://www.BCGA.co.uk) or you can contact Doug Thornton on **+44 1332 225120**.