

April 2011

Conversations with ACFA

The Asian Clean Fuels Association (ACFA) crossed its 10-year mark in 2010. In conjunction with this milestone, we are launching “*Conversation with ACFA*”, a series of interviews with thought leaders in the clean fuels industry.

In Conversation with: Ahmed Alumar

We start the series with Ahmed Alumar, current President of ACFA and Vice President of SABIC Asia Pacific, based in Singapore. He shared his thoughts and his experiences as ACFA President during the past two years, as well as his vision for the Association.



ACFA: ACFA celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2010. What were some of the most challenging issues ACFA has had to deal with during your Presidency?

Ahmed Alumar: The past two years have been very smooth for me. This speaks volumes of past leadership and the effectiveness of the Association in the years before I joined the Association.

The main focus in the past two years has been to continue building the Association in the face of changing industry dynamics and generating value for our partners, including our members. We focused on consolidating the work the Association has done to date and putting in place resources that would support the Association's continued success in advancing the use of clean fuels.

Having worked the ground and legislation circles for eight years, ACFA was well positioned to give the industry a more prominent voice through more aggressive outreach efforts. We added a dedicated resource in communication which enabled us to benefit from stronger relationships and more effective interaction with our key stakeholders.

We take very seriously our work of sharing the knowledge and science of our business with our stakeholders. The fuels industry is a very complex business; cutting through the noise and bringing across clearly the technical knowledge that has policy implications is not easy. As an Association, we need to be effective in communicating our message to the right people.

ACFA: What do you consider the Association's highlights or key achievements in the past 10 years?

Ahmed Alumar: ACFA's mission is to promote and advance the use of cleaner automotive fuels based on the principles of sound science, economics and sustainability of the environment. The three – science, economics and the environment – are not always aligned in the fuels industry. When they are out of sync, typically politics or short-term economics have filled the gap. The role of ACFA is to use good science to ensure that the right people truly understand the issues and can make informed decisions about the best way forward.

The founding members of ACFA wanted it to be an objective voice that offers credible, science-based technical information about clean fuel components that will enable and empower stakeholders to make optimal choices when developing clean fuels programs. In that sense, the Association was created to serve the greater good as we are not driven by a commercial mandate.

Over the years, ACFA has successfully engaged governments and relevant bodies in Japan, China, Gulf Standards Organisation and the League of Arab States amongst others, providing useful technical and policy knowledge to further their clean fuels goals. In China for example, ACFA has since 2004 supported provincial and central governments to develop local and nationwide fuels quality specifications. In less than a decade, China moved from a country with no formal fuel quality standards to one with a master blueprint for the next 10 years. That is an astounding feat for a country that many considered to be a late starter in the use of cleaner fuels.

ACFA has developed strong partnerships with international organizations, such as the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities (CAI-Asia) which is supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to advance clean fuels progress in Asia and the Middle East.

ACFA's most significant achievement as I see it is successfully establishing itself as a credible partner to governments and other industry stakeholders in Asia and the Middle East. We like to think that we have contributed to the evolution of cleaner fuels in this part of the world, by acting as a catalyst for positive change.

ACFA: You have been ACFA's President since September 2008. How would you describe your experience?

Ahmed Alumar: It has been an enriching experience for me not just in terms of knowledge building. My knowledge of the industry and the region has grown tremendously, because of the opportunity that this position has given me, working with people from different countries and culture.

When you create the right environment and work with people who respect and trust each other, regardless of their different backgrounds, you really get to enjoy the process and have fun.

We have one agenda - ACFA's agenda - and that always help us to make decisions that best serves the industry and society's interests.

ACFA: With the Association where it is now, where would you like to see it go from here?

Ahmed Alumar: I would like to see ACFA continuing its good work and to fulfill its vision of a world powered by cleaner automotive fuels that benefit society as a whole.

Besides the shifting fuels landscape, a confluence of several structural changes such as a growing emphasis on renewable energy sources and changing consumer attitudes towards fuels are expected to present unprecedented challenges for the global fuels industry in the next few decades.

We have to be prepared to deal with these. This is likely to involve putting in place systems and policies that can sustain ACFA's effectiveness and relevance in the long-term. Standing on the shoulders of what the Association has achieved thus far, ACFA has a strong foundation to grow into a global organization that effectively support the clean fuels industry.

ACFA: How would you define your personal leadership style?

Ahmed Alumar: I have a simple philosophy: the people I work with are my family. Nothing satisfies me more than to see them inspired, working together as one with a great sense of ownership to achieve common goals and objectives. Trust is an important component.

I do not think that being a leader means that I am solely responsible for its success. It's always a team effort. We learn from each other. There is always room for improvement.

Leadership to me is a matter of how I can inspire the team to work towards the same objective and achieve great results for the organization. The question that keeps me awake at night is how do I inspire the team to produce excellent results, while working well together?

I see my role as a leader as someone who empowers my staff to experience being a part of a family. When ownership is present, people will naturally perform to the best of their abilities. When an employee becomes part of our “family”, there is not much else I need to do.

I am genuinely interested in the lives of the people I work with and am concerned about them as a fellow human being. I like to engage my staff and do my best to make decisions that best support them at work and in their lives.

I firmly believe that no staff should leave because he or she is not being treated well in the company. Losing a staff is like losing a family member. I will do what I can to keep the family together.

At the end of the day, being a leader is not just a job. It is more than that. Being a leader gives me an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. I am motivated in what I do because I have an opportunity to make a difference. When it is time for me to move on, I can look back and know that I have made a difference here.

ACFA: What do you want your legacy at ACFA to be?

Ahmed Alumar: I want ACFA to be for the fuels industry what the United Nations is for the world – a trusted, well respected organization that various stakeholders consider to be a useful and powerful partner.

ACFA is not a dream of an individual. Everyone on the team, from members to administrators, has to buy into this vision. As the current President, I support the team and I count on ACFA members and staff to make ACFA the “UN of the clean fuels industry.”

Getting to know Ahmed Alumar

Ahmed Alumar, President of the Asian Clean Fuels Association (ACFA) earned his credentials in another part of the world.

He was educated in Saudi Arabia and since 1987 has worked for Riyadh-based SABIC, the Saudi Basic Industries Corporation, one of the world's leading manufacturers of chemicals, fertilizers, plastics and metals.

He began his tenure with the company in Riyadh, and eventually Alumar was appointed to lead the regional office in Asia Pacific in Singapore in 2008. Two years later he was named vice

president of SABIC Asia Pacific. In that position he manages 20 offices, five manufacturing sites and four technology centers, storage facilities and warehouses and he leads all sales and marketing efforts.

Besides serving as president of ACFA, he is chairman of the board of directors of the Global Methanol Institute. He is also on the board of directors of SABIC Asia Pacific and SABIC-Sinopec JV in China, as well as chairman of the board at SABIC Shanghai Trading and China Technology & Innovation Center.

Alumar has a MBA from King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dharan, and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. ♦

Copyright ©2011 Asian Clean Fuels Association. All rights reserved.