



A Message from the SHAPA Chairman

Last year when I stood in front of the SHAPA Annual General Meeting, things looked pretty grim. In fact it's easy to forget just how grim. We had just witnessed outbreak of war in Europe, for the first time in 70 years. Energy prices were exploding and there were threats of a cold winter with no Russian gas. There was potential for global food shortages, and threats of nuclear Armageddon. Brexit was causing a lot of problems with components and materials import and export. Many EU people were leaving the economy. And let's not forget that we were still struggling to recover after two years of disruption due to Covid, unsure of whether it would resurge. I can't remember the last time in my sixty odd years, that things looked so bad.

But of all those terrible things that we thought were likely to happen, how many came to pass? As it happened, 2022-23 turned into a year of "settling back to normal" – or at least what passes for a "new normal"! So all things considered – it could have been much worse!

Early in the year we faced shortages and spiralling prices for energy and materials, loan interest rates rising and the effects of Brexit – which the politicians think is over – just starting to bite.

The ongoing effect of Putin's war are still with us and look like they will be indefinitely, but they've not been as severe for us as they were looking this time last year. Let's not forget they are pretty severe for the people of Ukraine, with hundreds of thousands injured and millions fleeing the country and massive disruption to their lives – we need to keep this in our minds and continue to show solidarity with Ukraine's people, in lots of different ways - not just militarily.

Turning back to home, the upsets to the "status quo" have brought challenges to our customers – but these have brought new opportunities for SHAPA members. It may not be "business as usual" but it's certainly "plenty of business".

The focus on energy has had positive impacts – although energy prices for many companies are almost back to what they were, there is a new awareness that price and availability is a threat, so many are much more focused on insulating themselves from future shocks.

The higher power prices have given a boost green energy options including biomass and energy from waste. Likewise higher commodity prices have driven more interest in recycling. All of this is positive for emissions reduction, as well as business for SHAPA members!

Likewise companies are interested in investing in energy saving solutions, again giving new opportunities for SHAPA members to deliver new and more efficient solids processing solutions.

Highlights of SHAPA activities in the past year include another run of our Digital Marketing Workshop, always one of the most popular events. Also we have co-sponsored numerous events with IMechE (Bulk Solids Handling Towards Net Zero), the Association of Bulk Terminal Operators (Bulk Handling at Ports and Terminals short course) and the Materials Handling Engineers' Association (Bulkex Conference and Exhibition). All these events help to share knowledge, especially for people new to the field, and promote networking between our members.

I'd like to also say a special "thank you" to our Technical and Marketing Subcommittees for their hard work. Surveillance of standards, update and review of documents in the technical resource archive,



promotion of the interests of SHAPA members have all been pursued actively and we will all benefit from their hard work.

We have plenty of ongoing challenges of course:

- Recruitment – still there are very few young people coming into engineering, and especially into solids handling.
- We no longer have the same easy access to cheap labour from Eastern Europe, so we're having to bite the bullet and invest in higher pay for skilled people if we want to keep them – especially technicians. For that reason we need to keep focused on training more apprentices.
- We still have a very strong gender imbalance in the technical and management sides of our industry, which limits the pool of people we recruit from. We've often talked about it, but failed to make any progress.
- Brexit remains a challenge in some areas; although the paperwork problems have mostly been overcome, UKCA marking is still mired in delays and difficulties.

We have lots of things to look forwards to in the forthcoming year, including more events for training especially of young engineers, and of course our regular quarterly meeting which is outstandingly effective for networking but also will continue to have a varied programme of speakers on subjects you need to know about – regulation, economics, management and finance issues to mention just a few.

I would also urge all member companies to get their people involved in the technical subcommittee and the marketing subcommittee. These are great opportunities to share knowledge and learn about how to do things better, and bring the benefit back into your business.

If I had to sum up where we are now, I would say most of us have no shortage of work, but will continue to struggle for critical resources – skilled labour, materials and components – and the squeeze on profitability will continue.

In closing, I'd like to give three messages, lessons to learn from the past year:

- Stay prepared for shocks and unexpected disruption, and the opportunities they bring
- Do more about training of skilled people
- Get more involved in SHAPA – together we are stronger, able to help each other.

Best of luck for the rest of 2023!

Mike