



European association for Surface Treatment on Aluminium

Association Profile: ESTAL

The European Association for Surface Treatment on Aluminium (ESTAL) works with its members to find solutions to technical, economic and ecological issues associated with surface treated aluminium. Following a successful congress in 2015, **Nadine Firth*** spoke to Ivo Vermeeren about the challenges faced by this sector of the industry.

"The next time you walk into a high building, take a few minutes to admire the façade of the building. Maybe you will notice that the building shows a metallic surface with a bronze shade or the building has a very elegant coloured façade. Most of the time, people do not know what the surface is made of.

"In fact, the first façade with the bronze shade is probably made of anodised aluminium whereas the coloured façade is made of organic coated aluminium. Both processes are based on the treatment of the aluminium surface. Anodising and powder coating are the most widely used processes for aluminium surface treatment."

Q. What was the reasoning behind the formation of ESTAL?

A. ESTAL was officially founded in 1989, first as an umbrella organisation over two independent organisations: Euras and Eurocoat. These two European associations were set up in 1971 (Euras) and 1985 (Eurocoat) in order to promote the interests of the aluminium anodisers and coaters. Due to the fact that an increasing number of aluminium surface treatment plants had both anodising and coating facilities, it was decided to merge Euras and Eurocoat into one single organisation to represent both industries. Today, ESTAL is a European federation of 13 national associations in 14 European countries, plus eight associate members, including coaters or anodisers located in countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Poland and Slovakia where there is no national association.

Q. What is the mission of ESTAL?

A. The mission of ESTAL is basically to defend and promote the interests of its members at International level, and in particular at European level, to work in order to find solutions to technical, economical and ecological issues linked with aluminium surface treatment,

and finally to encourage the sharing of knowledge among members and the development of new technologies.

In our opinion, surface treatment on aluminium is not restricted to anodising and powder coating, but also includes non-galvanic, chemical and electrolytic methods.

ESTAL aims to become the platform for all treatments and applications on a European level, which means that the industry, the suppliers and the users of finished aluminium are invited to participate in our European Association.

Q. How does ESTAL work with the aluminium industry?

A. ESTAL anodisers and coaters work with aluminium. Up to now we have had regular, but not intensive contacts with the aluminium industry at European level through European Aluminium or at national level through the local aluminium producers' associations. It is interesting to remark that in some national associations, the same staff deal with the national aluminium producers' association and with the national aluminium finishers' association.

In 2015 the Members of ESTAL decided that it would be an added value for the aluminium finishers to have a closer cooperation with the aluminium producers. For this reason, ESTAL has joined European Aluminium as a member from January 2016.

Q. In what way does ESTAL support its members?

A. Regulatory measures, especially European legislation, are one of the major challenges for the aluminium finishers, because they often have a technical and financial impact on the finishing plants, who are in their majority small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

ESTAL defends the interests of the aluminium finishing industry in Brussels and has hired a Technical Coordinator whose main role is to liaise between ESTAL

and the European authorities. European legislation projects, which may harm our industry, and information that our association wants to forward to Brussels are discussed at the meetings of the Joint Technical Committee (JTC), attended by representatives of finishers, suppliers of surface treatment and various quality label organisations.

Having a voice in Brussels is critical today for our industry given the many changes in European legislation (energy efficiency, IED). ESTAL is recognised at European level as the voice of the aluminium surface treatment sector and has been invited to discuss the issue of nanomaterials with the European Commission. Being present in Brussels makes it possible for ESTAL to pass on information and concerns from the finishing plants on to a higher level (European authorities, lobbying organisations) at the right time.

In addition to the information given to the members through various channels (website, information bulletins, working group meetings etc), ESTAL organises a congress every two years, with the aim to treat the subject of aluminium surface treatment in a neutral, independent and comprehensive manner from various perspectives. The ESTAL Congress not only offers updates on ESTAL's European lobbying activities and developments within the association, but also presentations on geographical markets and different industries using aluminium surface treatment. The last ESTAL Congress took place in September 2015 in Porto (Portugal).

In this way, ESTAL provides fresh impetus for the aluminium finishing industry, with the aim of maintaining existing markets and opening up new opportunities and business areas for its members.

It is not only the aluminium surface treatment industry that is confronted with regulatory, technical and economic challenges. Other market actors who are situated upstream and downstream in the supply chain are faced with similar

*Editor, Aluminium International Today

challenges, therefore it is important for ESTAL to join efforts with other organisations in order to work together for a better future for our members. For this reason, ESTAL keeps contacts with European and non-European organisations who work on similar issues or who can support ESTAL in its lobbying activities (e.g. FAECF, CEPE CETS, Nickel institute, IHAA, JAPA etc.).

Establishing a relationship with the market players is not only beneficial for ESTAL as an association, but is also beneficial for the surface treatment plants at local level.

Q. What are the biggest challenges facing the industry?

A. In general, modern finishes are environmentally friendly. However, modern European legislation tends to banish dangerous metals or substances from production. The requirements for an environmentally friendly production of aluminium surface treatment are constantly more demanding. Modern surface treatment plants place a larger accent on a production process that, first, does not generate any waste and, secondly, endeavours to recycle all the

energy produced in the factory.

The ability to treat the aluminium surface with always shorter delivery times and to produce the required colour shades in a few hours are some of the important requirements for anodisers and coaters, and critical success factors for a modern surface finisher.

Treating the surface of aluminium is a challenge. Our industry looks for new applications and new markets. Driving this search are the demands for cost effectiveness in the production process and the search for specialities to satisfy the design and fashion trends of architects. One of the critical success factors is to make aluminium more attractive to the final customers. This will ensure aluminium usage increases and, as a result, more applications for the aluminium surface treatment.

Q. Do you see continued research and development in the industry?

A. There is definitely continued research and development in the industry. On one side, research institutes such as VUB, the Free University in Brussels, TUD, the Technical Institute of the Delft University (Netherlands) or the University of Aveiro in Portugal currently work on ambitious

projects together with various industry players to develop new coatings for various applications.

On the other side, the suppliers of the aluminium surface treatment constantly work on product development in order to make the aluminium surface treatment industry more sustainable.

This was clearly illustrated by the different presentations given at the ESTAL Congress in Porto on the research currently being done in the field of aluminium surface treatment.

Q. What does 2016 have in store for ESTAL?

A. The year 2016 will mark a new development for our association as ESTAL is now part of European Aluminium. We are thrilled about the new opportunities that this membership will bring to our members. Together, we can promote the unique strength of aluminium for sustainability and recyclability of buildings and in this way promote aluminium and aluminium surface treatment. This new development brings nothing but benefits to both organisations and has a direct positive influence on the added value for the ESTAL members. ■



Gillespie & Powers, Inc.

9550 True Drive St. Louis, MO 63132 USA

PHONE 314-423-9460 TOLL FREE 1-800-325-7075 FAX 314-428-4431

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