

IWMA: Past, Present & Future

The early days of the International Water Mist Association (IWMA) were rather provisional and informal. However, there was a target.

Looking back, Dirk Sprakel, chief executive officer at the Cologne-based company Fogtec and current deputy chairman of the board, today puts it like this: "Against the background of the then developments, which had some of their roots in Eastern Germany – where the IWMA had its headquarters for many years – the founding members of the IWMA wanted to aim at bundling what was happening on an international level and communicate matters of common interest." These intentions led to the founding of the IWMA, which took place 15 years ago in April 1998.

The following two years were a phase of initiation during which the few – mainly German – members merely worked together on joint research projects and established a working group to collect existing guidelines for standardisation worldwide. Dirk Sprakel says: "The first two years were a time of casual exchange of thoughts and ideas, but as time went on our plans became more palpable."

In 2000, the IWMA became more international and in April of 2001 the first International Water Mist Conference (IWMC) was organised in co-operation with Factory Mutual Research, the Norwegian fire research laboratory SINTEF, the Swedish institute SP and the Finish institute VTT. Karl J. Sprakel, the first chairman of the board, welcomed more than 70 delegates from 20 countries to Vienna, Austria to exchange views and information. Among others, the purpose of this conference was to clarify that water mist is not only an auxiliary technology but a very sufficient method to extinguish fires, which is completely independent from traditional sprinkler systems.

Back then, water mist and the IWMA were met with scepticism and open opposition. Dirk Sprakel remarks: "At the beginning we were smirked at mainly because we were lateral entrants coming from water hydraulics and completely new to the firefighting industry, which we knew next to nothing about." Many things have changed since then due to natural learning processes, some important turning points and even to the odd moment of glory.



Turning Points and Moments of Glory

The initial developments within Northern Europe – through UltraFog, Marioff, Semco and Novenco – had their effects on the firefighting market. In the late 1990s it was high time to establish an association that supported research, development and applications, brought together those who were active in that business and tackled one major problem: the establishment of international guidelines for the approval of water mist systems.

"Since then the IWMA has become the world leading forum for manufacturers, laboratories, classification institutions, academic institutions and users of water mist fire-fighting systems", says Ragnar Wighus, chief scientist at SINTEF and long-standing chairman of the IWMA-board. In order to reach that position there was work to be done and chances to be seized. In that respect a research project sponsored by the IWMA on "scaling of fire suppression characteristics in machinery spaces" carried out by SINTEF on behalf of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) was one of the great moments. The presentation of the outcomes in February 2009 was a key event for the Association. Another important milestone for the IWMA was the opportunity to support the European Committee for Standardisation, and to contribute to the CEN-guidelines. Also the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has asked the IWMA to hold seminars during its annual events, and so has relied on the expertise of the Association.

Most important though may be the fact that the largest part of the opposition has petered out and scepticism along with it. "Some of our opponents from the initial phase – even the very severe ones – are indeed involved in the water mist industry themselves these days. And some of them are even members of the IWMA", says Dirk Sprakel. **APF**



The 13th International Water Mist Conference will take place on 16th and 17th October 2013 in Paris, France.

For more information, go to www.iwma.net