Solvay Recomits to Conducting Business in a Socially-Responsible, Sustainable Manner with Renewal of Global Framework Agreement

IndustriALL Global Union and Solvay renewed on Feb. 3, 2017 the Global Framework Agreement (GFA), which commits the company to socially responsible business practices and sustainable development. The USW is affiliated with IndustriALL.

“This agreement is a benchmark in terms of social dialogue in the chemical industry,” said IndustriALL General Secretary Valter Sanches. “We have established a strong culture and constructive labor relations worldwide over the last 12 years.”

The five-year agreement reinforces and adds basic labor and social rights for employees at all Solvay operations worldwide. It specifies that the company is to work with its employees and their representatives, respect their right to organize without interference, and operate in a socially-responsible, environmentally-friendly manner.

Through the agreement, Solvay reaffirms its commitment to the International Labor Organization’s social standards and the principles of the United Nationals Global Compact. Like other GFAs, it guarantees mutual respect and cooperation across a multinational’s worldwide operations and binds a company to respect international standards on labor rights, health, safety and the environment.

New Additions

The renewal agreement now includes the company’s allegiance to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) guidelines for multinational enterprises. Solvay’s suppliers and subcontractors are expected to adhere to these principles.

The renewed GFA also includes new social projects, such as the protection of mental safety at work (no intentional stress or bullying) and societal actions. It reinforces Solvay’s commitments to workplace health and safety, anti-discrimination, diversity and environmental protection.

Monitoring Agreement

IndustriALL and Solvay will continue to choose a country and site for their two joint missions per year to assess the company’s safety policies and the GFAs implementation. The Solvay Global Forum, which

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New Global Forum Agreement Includes Memorandum to Hold U.S. Managers Accountable to Solvay’s Policies

For the first time, the newly renewed global framework agreement (GFA) between IndustriALL Global Union and Solvay contains a memorandum for the U.S.

In the past several years, USW members reported that some of their managers disregarded the GFA and acted in a manner contrary to the principles established in the agreement. This management behavior resulted in undue delays in reaching a fair agreement. That is why the USW insisted on a memorandum agreement for the U.S. No longer will U.S. managers be able to ignore or act like the GFA does not apply to their operations.

“Over the past few years we urged Solvay corporate management to ensure their American managers adhere to the GFA,” said USW International Vice President Carol Landry. “With this additional memorandum that pertains just to the U.S., we are hopeful that this will send a clear message to American management that corporate leadership expects them to follow the GFA just like the European managers.”

Special Attention Needed
Solvay and IndustriALL agreed to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to bring special attention and importance to the company’s U.S. labor relations, especially since its U.S. group expanded with mergers in recent years.

The MOU creates a task force to develop U.S. labor relations at the local and national level in accordance with the GFA, so there is good-faith bargaining at the local sites, a search for appropriate solutions to site issues and adherence to the GFA.

The task force includes representatives from the USW, Solvay corporate and U.S. management, IndustriALL, and the Solvay Global Forum.

Landry said the task force will also look at the problems at the sites and ways to fix them. She said Solvay corporate management will visit the sites and go with USW local union leaders to talk with local management and ensure they understand the GFA.

The MOU provides for the task force to have a meeting to evaluate the situation, make proposals and report back to the GFA signatories and Solvay Global Forum. The MOU will continue through Dec. 31, 2018.

“If we don’t see improvement in health and safety and the way members are treated, we will pull out of the GFA, and Solvay doesn’t want that,” Landry added.

Renewal Signifies Trust Between Labor, Management

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has eight Solvay union representatives from major countries, will now monitor the fulfillment of the agreement.

“For Solvay, the five-year renewal is testimony of the relationship of trust we’ve successfully developed with IndustriALL for more than a decade now,” said Solvay CEO Jean-Pierre Clamadieu. “We advocate an open, challenging and constructive dialogue with our employees and their representatives. This dialogue is part of our sustainability commitments and a contributor to our overall performance.”

Sanches and Clamadieu signed the GFA five-year renewal at Solvay headquarters in Brussels, Belgium on Feb. 3, 2017. Also present were IndustriALL Assistant General Secretary Kemal Özkan, Solvay Global Forum Coordinator Albert Kruft and USW International Vice President Carol Landry.

“Cooperative relationships between management and hourly employees will be crucial to Solvay’s continued success in the vital North American market,” Landry said. “The company’s North American operations account for 26 percent of its group sales in 2015 and 27 percent of its plants are in North America.”

Solvay Global Forum
“The renewal brings a Global Forum, which will be an important platform for dialogue between union/employee representatives and management,” said Sanches.

Besides the eight union representatives from Brazil, China, France, Germany, Italy, South Korea and the United States, the forum also has three management members. Jeff Hill represents Solvay workers in the U.S. and is a longtime leader and member of USW Local 14200 in Marietta, Ohio.

Established after the signing of the GFA in 2013 between Solvay and IndustriALL, the forum meets in Brussels once a year and conducts three video conferences in–between the face-to-face visit. The group reviews the company’s entire operations, including financial results, investment plans and the safety record. It also focuses on Solvay’s priorities, commitments to sustainability and diversity, and reviews the company’s Global Performance Sharing Plan.

“The Solvay Global Forum has been invaluable,” Hill said. “It has been an excellent vehicle to develop international solidarity and help solve outstanding workplace issues in the U.S.”
USW Pledges to Help Resolve Outstanding Plant Issues

Solvay locals are raising issues regarding the company’s use of subcontractors, failure to resolve a ventilation problem, non-adherence to seniority and difficulty in producing accurate paychecks.

At the University Park, Ill., facility in January, Solvay laid off six more Local 2011 members, including one maintenance worker, while retaining the subcontractors, says Local 2011 President Mike Spicknall. The company claims the subcontractors are doing capital improvement work, while the union contends it is bargaining unit work.

Replacing full-time employees with subcontractors is a continuing problem at this Solvay location. In October 2015 the company laid off seven employees, including two maintenance workers, and kept the subcontractors, claiming it did so because of financial budgetary concerns and weak business performance.

District 7 Staff Representative Frank Shubert says the company ignored plant-wide seniority when handling the 2015 layoffs.

He also says that while Solvay saved on employee costs in one account, it paid $1 million from another account for subcontractors in 2016.

“A major part of the subcontractor work had to be redone by our guys,” he adds.

Shubert recently arbitrated the company’s use of subcontractors while employees were laid off.

“Our position in the arbitration was that the company violated the contract when it laid off bargaining unit maintenance employees while transferring their work to outside contractors and that the company failed to honor plant-wide seniority when it announced lay-offs in October of 2015. The union strongly believes that management laid off workers at University Park to demoralize the membership before contract talks began in November 2015,” he says.

The arbitrator’s decision is expected in a couple of months.

Prior to the October 2015 layoffs, Solvay employed outside subcontractors when there was excessive work, when employees brushed up against fatigue guidelines, and when employees turned down overtime, Shubert says.

Local 2011’s contract only allows Solvay to use subcontractors if there is excess bargaining unit work at the end of a day, however, the company must ask employees first if they want the overtime before subcontractors are called.

USW International Vice President Carol Landry is raising the subcontractor/layoff issue with Solvay corporate management in Brussels.

Ventilation Lacking

The lack of a ventilation system at University Park is still a problem. Spicknall reports that the company could not determine if a worker’s rash was from an exposure at work or at home. Some employees have already developed asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Shubert says he cannot stay in the plant four hours without getting sick.

Jeff Hill from Local 14200, who is the U.S. representative on the Solvay Global Forum, is working with Local 2011 and bringing the ventilation issue to the forum's attention. Also, Ashlee Fitch, with the USW Health, Safety and Environment department, is investigating the ventilation problem and working with Shubert and Local 2011 to address the air quality issues.

Seniority, Paycheck Issues

Management shut down an operation on Dec. 31, 2016 at the Solvay Fluorides, LLC plant in Alorton, Ill. The action is displacing at least five workers on April 1. Local 7-4294, an amalgamated local, represents 20 employees at the facility.

Carlos Reed, the unit griever for the plant, says that management is ignoring contract seniority language regarding the expected layoff. Landry is following up on this situation.

Reed says the company is also shorting the amount of incentive pay due some workers. When the money is added to the next paycheck, the amount is sometimes in the next higher tax bracket, causing more taxes to be deducted.

Reed says this has been a problem since October 2015, so Landry is asking Hill to get the details of the matter and bring it to the attention of the global forum.

She encourages Solvay local union leaders to inform her of problems, like the Alorton paycheck issue, much sooner so the International can help locals resolve them.

Upcoming Health & Safety Survey

Fitch, who gave a presentation at the June Solvay council meeting, is developing an in-depth survey to determine the health and safety issues at the USW-represented Solvay plants. Locals should contact her if they have questions they would like to see on the survey. Fitch’s email address is afitch@usw.org and her (continued on page 4)
USW Encourages Former Cytec Locals to Participate in Council

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The survey, which will also be in Spanish, will be sent to each local’s president and health and safety committee members in mid- to late March. Fitch says the survey will help determine each local’s health and safety training needs, help grow the health and safety program at each facility, and help develop a health and safety committee for locals that do not have one.

Invitation to Former Cytec Locals

Landry is urging more former Cytec locals to participate in the Solvay council to increase its strength and unity, especially when approaching the company with an issue. She also is encouraging these locals to participate on the council’s conference calls.

On the Jan. 19 conference call, District Two Staff Representative Terry Newton reported that Local 220 at the former Cytec plant in Kalamazoo, Mich., negotiated a contract in February 2015 that took only three days without any major issues. He said the local union president has worked at the facility for many years and has a good relationship with management.

Solvay Global Forum

Hill says that Jean-Christophe Sciberras, Solvay head of the Industrial Relations group in Brussels, invited him to attend the Solvay Industrial Relations meeting in California last October, along with human resources site managers and industrial managers from 14 nations. Sciberras told him it was the first time that Solvay had a worker sit in on the process.

During the four-day meeting, Hill says he toured the Solvay Anaheim plant, represented by the Machinists Union, and spoke with the local union officers in order to build up the forum’s communication network.

Blue Island Workers Ratify New Agreement

Local 7-209-09 members at Solvay’s Blue Island, Ill., plant on March 14 overwhelmingly ratified a new three-year agreement with wage and benefit improvements that only required three days to negotiate.

“Unlike bargaining at the Chicago Heights and University Park facilities last year, the negotiations at Blue Island were positive,” said District 7 Staff Representative Frank Shubert. “Management caucused and returned with counterproposals or additional questions in an hour or less in most cases. We spent a great deal of time meeting face-to-face to reach common ground and obtain genuine compromises.”

Negotiations at Chicago Heights and University Park took months and were filled with delays and a lack of face time at the bargaining table. Contract resolution at those two sites required several mobilization activities and solidarity from the Solvay council, support from the Solvay Global Forum, and help from the International through numerous visits and conversations with Solvay’s executive group from Brussels, Belgium.

The International’s involvement laid the groundwork for improved negotiations at Blue Island, Shubert said.

Through the efforts of the USW, the 27 members at Blue Island will receive wage increases of 80-cents the first year, 85-cents the second year and 90-cents the third year; a one-time $800 bonus, and eligibility for enrollment in the integrated 401k benefits.

They will receive an increase in short-term disability benefits, vacation time and the safety shoe allotment; a reduction in the hours required for vacation eligibility and the time a disciplinary action can be used toward progressive discipline, and improved attendance policy guidelines and perfect attendance awards.

The contract also includes adoption of the Cook County sick leave ordinance, which increases paid sick leave from two to five days.