

EPEE 20 years anniversary Interview



Jürgen Fischer

- In 2020, elected Chair of EPEE, the European Partnership for Energy and the Environment.
- Master's Degree in Economics
- In 2008, joined Danfoss as Vice President for Industrial Automation
- In 2010, became Senior Vice President for Automatic Controls and in 2013, appointed President of the Refrigeration and A/C Division
- Since 2015, has been President of Danfoss Cooling
- Member of SEforALL, a Global UN Panel for Cooling for All, and a member of the Advisory Board of TÜV SÜD Germany



Andrea Voigt

- In 2009, appointed Director General of EPEE
- Master in Public Administration, Master in linguistic science and a Marketing degree
- Over two decades of experience in the HVACR industry with a strong focus on energy efficiency and climate related topics
- Board member of the EU Coalition for Energy Savings, the Cool Coalition (UNEP), and the Global Panel on Access to Cooling (UN SEforALL)

1. Congratulations to the 20th anniversary. Tell us about the two decades history, how EPEE was created and how did it evolve to what it is today?

Andrea Voigt, EPEE Director General: Dear REHVA friends, thank you very much for your good wishes!

Yes, EPEE was founded 20 years ago, time flies! Back then, our association was a small coalition of a handful of companies focussing on the RoHS Directive and the first version of the F-Gas Regulation. EPEE members fought hard for the principles of leak tightness of HVACR equipment and certification of installers based on experience gathered from the Netherlands and it was considered a major success when these principles were enshrined in the first version of the F-Gas Regulation

in 2006. Both of them are still essential pillars of the second version of the F-Gas Regulation, have set a precedent for other regions in the world such as Japan, and will certainly continue to play an important role in the third version of the F-Gas Regulation for which the review has just started.

Today, EPEE is much more than the small coalition it was back in 2000. We currently have over 50 members, uniting the leaders of our industry and truly representing the full value chain of the refrigeration, air-conditioning and heat pump sector. Our scope has broadened considerably, as we follow all major topics that are relevant for our members with a strong emphasis on energy efficiency in the broadest sense

from products through to systems, indoor air quality, circular economy, etc. Being Brussels based, our focus obviously continues to be on Europe, where we are also a member of a number of important alliances such as the Coalition for Energy Savings which I am going to chair as of 2021. The latter is a cross-sectoral alliance of businesses, local authorities, cooperatives and civil society organisations striving to make energy efficiency and savings the first consideration of energy and economic policies in the EU. In addition to Europe, we have built up, over the past two decades, a strong network with friends across the globe. For example, we are a partner of the Cool Coalition which brings together key stakeholders from industry, civil society, academia and governments, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and we are a member of the Global Panel on Access to Cooling of the Sustainable Energy For All Initiative.

2. What do you see as key technology trends for the HVCR-R industry in the coming decade?

Jürgen Fischer, EPEE Chairman: We believe that major trends in this coming decade will be energy efficiency coupled with GWP reduction of refrigerants, based on two major transitions: the refrigerant transition and the energy transition in the context of climate neutrality by 2050 under the European Green Deal.

In terms of the refrigerant transition, in Europe, the F-Gas Regulation drives the move towards lower GWP refrigerants and on a global level, it will be the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol which has already been ratified by over 100 countries. This means that besides lowering the GWP of refrigerants – whether by moving to lower GWP HFCs, HFOs or non-fluorinated alternatives – there will be a strong focus on reducing charge sizes, leak tightness, and also recycling and reclaim of refrigerants based on circularity principles.

In terms of the energy transition, heating and cooling have a key role to play as they consume roughly half of the total final energy in Europe with 80% still being based on fossil fuels, mainly for heating purposes. Sector coupling, in particular in view of the electrification of the heating sector, will therefore be essential. This means for example that technologies such as heat pumps, whether on-site or powering district heating and cooling networks will see significant growth. In parallel, the electricity mix will be increasingly based on renewables calling for systemic efficiency with solutions such as waste heat recovery, thermal storage and demand side flexibility for the grid to be able to handle fluctuating renewable energies and peak demand. In

the same vein, it will be crucial to reduce the energy demand by looking at parameters such as maintenance and controls, informing and empowering consumers to intervene when systems are not running efficiently, etc. These are exciting times for our sector, with huge opportunities serving the energy and climate agenda while fostering sustainable growth.

3. Tell us about the Count on Cooling campaign

AV: We launched the Count on Cooling campaign at the beginning of the year – unfortunately not with the flagship event for which we had originally planned due to the COVID-19 crisis, but still with a very well attended online event. The objective of our campaign is threefold: One, it is to raise awareness about the crucial role of cooling for society, for a healthy and productive indoor climate, safe and fresh food, medicine and vaccines. In fact, when we designed the main messages of our campaign back in 2019, we did not suspect how much our sector would be in the spotlight with the need to keep vaccines refrigerated in light of the major pandemic which is currently overshadowing our life. Two, it is to demonstrate that cooling is part of the solution to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, by taking an integrated approach with heating and supporting the phase-out of fossil fuels. And three, to explain our approach to sustainable cooling and showcase the solutions and technologies that are readily available for broad deployment.

In short, we have identified five major steps to provide sustainable cooling: Optimise the need for cooling, use energy and resources efficiently, mitigate the climate impact of refrigerants, shift to renewable energies and address the investment cost. More information about these steps can be found in our white paper, which is available for download and also summarised in a short video under www.countoncooling.eu. Over the course of the year, we presented our approach at numerous occasions, organised online events and prepared informative material. For next year, we will continue our activities and will be happy to cooperate with friends and partners such as REHVA to further spread the word on the importance of sustainable heating and cooling.

4. What are the most important climate & energy policy and regulatory issues for EPEE in this very busy and times with many important EU and global policies relevant for your sector?

AV: these are very busy times and as previously mentioned, they present a wealth of opportunities for our sector. But we need to make sure that our solutions are well understood by policy makers, that they get

the attention they deserve and that synergies between different regulatory frameworks are well taken into account. This may sound very straight forward but as so often the devil is in the detail and the importance of associations such as EPEE and REHVA cannot be underestimated to make our voice heard loud and clear. The good news is that the European Green Deal has brought forward initiatives which break through the silo-thinking. The Energy System Integration Strategy and the Renovation Wave are good examples in that respect, as they take an integrated approach on different sectors, among others integrating buildings in the energy system. In that sense, and from a very broad perspective, it is important for EPEE members that energy efficiency is seen as an enabler for decarbonisation, helping to facilitate the move to renewable energies. More specifically, we are working on the Energy Efficiency Directive, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the Renewable Energy Directive which will all be re-opened in view of achieving an increased greenhouse gas emission reduction target in 2030 and climate neutrality in 2050. Another top priority is of course the review of the F-Gas Regulation which has just started, alongside with various Ecodesign measures including those covering space heaters, professional refrigeration, and air heating and cooling products. Other important topics include the circular economy and energy taxation, to name only a few. On a global level, we will continue to closely follow the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol with its global phase-down of HFCs and the increased focus on energy efficiency. Again, it is important not to think in silos but to make sure that energy efficiency is not sacrificed when moving towards lower GWP refrigerants. In that context, we are partnering with UNEP and Gluckman Consulting, developing software tools that are intended to help governments model different scenarios and pathways towards achieving the HFC phase-down.

5. How do you think the covid-19 pandemic will change the HVAC-R industry and the EU association sector?

JF: The importance of Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) has been a topic in Europe for many years already, yet, it has always been lacking the political will to truly and broadly implement it with dedicated measures. With the pandemic, IAQ has suddenly gained much more attention. A safe and sound indoor environment is not seen any more as a “nice-to-have” but rather as a sine qua non condition for health and well-being. It is an essential parameter that can be delivered by heating and cooling equipment and, with well-insulated buildings

driven by energy efficiency requirements, it will become even more important and qualify our industry’s technologies as win-win solutions that do not only deliver energy savings and enable the phase-out of fossil fuels but also contribute to the health of people. We may imagine that building automation controls combined with sensor technologies will play an important role in that respect, too, measuring key parameters in terms of occupancy, air quality, and also safety as more and more flammable refrigerants will be used in heat pumps, etc.

AV: As the different facets of our sector come closer together with heating and cooling being increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin, for example via waste heat recovery from cooling equipment used for heating purposes, or via heat pumps that can provide both, heating and cooling, or with ventilation being increasingly required alongside heating and cooling, we may also see closer cooperation or perhaps, in the medium term, even consolidation in the association landscape. Today, we have associations for all individual sectors, for heating, for cooling, for ventilation, for heat pumps. Perhaps, we will see some of them grow together or at least form closer alliances than has been the case in the past. These developments would be mainly triggered by the political context, in my view. In addition, the pandemic may require some companies to re-evaluate which associations they support with their human and financial resources. This may further drive consolidation in the association landscape. Time will tell how this will evolve, I guess.

6. EPEE has been an active REHVA supporter for a decade. How do you see the role of REHVA and our cooperation?

AV: I think our associations are very complementary, both in terms of activities and in terms of membership. Where EPEE’s focus has always been more on the policy side, I have always considered REHVA’s focus more on the technical and standardisation side of things. EPEE’s members are companies whereas REHVA’s members are individuals (via national associations). EPEE has a strong focus on refrigeration, air-conditioning and heat pumps, whilst REHVA also concentrates on ventilation. The beauty is that despite these different focus areas and set-up, we have many common interests from indoor air quality through to energy efficiency in buildings. That makes us strong allies and partners and for the future, given the many challenges and opportunities that our sector will be facing, I would very much wish that we can continue to build on our good relationship and further strengthen it. Looking forward to the next decade! ■