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**AIRIA President
Shashi Kumar Singh,
Elected as Chairman of RCPSDC**



Inside

- **Rubber Talk** : Inside the World Of Moulds: from Core to Cleaning
- **Analysis**: The Mechanics and Safety of Rubber Mixing
- **Technical Article | Study**: Optimizing Silica Mixing Parameters for Fuel-Efficient Tire Manufacturing

Cover Story | Exclusive Interview - Mr. Shashi Kumar Singh

AIRIA President Shashi Kumar Singh, Elected as Chairman of RCPSDC

On this occasion, here is a tete-a-tete with Mr Shashi Kumar Singh, President, AIRIA and Chairman of Rubber, Chemical & Petrochemical Skill Development Council (RCPSDC)



Please shed some light on your new role as a Chairman at the Rubber, Chemical & Petrochemical Skill Development Council (RCPSDC). What are your plans for contributing to this esteemed organization?

Rubber, Chemical & Petrochemical Skill Development Council (RCPSDC) is focusing on accelerating the pace of providing skilled manpower to Rubber chemical & petrochemical sector which being are partly unorganised and minimise the demand supply gap. My primary goal at RCPSDC is to strengthen the linkage between the industry and the skill development programs. We need to ensure that the curriculum we develop is not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable. This involves incorporating the latest technological advancements and industry practices into our training modules. Additionally, I plan to focus on increasing industry participation in these programs, ensuring that companies are not just end-users of the skilled workforce but active contributors to their training.

Moving on to the broader rubber industry, how do you think it is currently equipped to skill its labor force?

The rubber industry has made significant strides in recent years to address the skill gap. Many companies have set up in-house training programs and are partnering with institutions like RCPSDC to develop standardized training modules. We also see a growing trend of using technology, such as virtual reality and simulation-based training, to provide hands-on experience in a controlled environment. However, there is still a long way to go. We need more collaboration between the industry and educational institutions to create a continuous learning skill ecosystem that evolves with the industry's needs.

The lack of a skilled workforce is a persistent challenge for many sectors. What specific challenges do you think the rubber and manufacturing industries in India face due to this issue?

One of the most significant challenges is the productivity gap. Without a skilled workforce, companies struggle to optimize their operations, leading to inefficiencies and higher production costs. Additionally, the lack of skilled labor hampers innovation. Skilled workers are not just operators; they bring in new ideas and improvements to processes. Another challenge is maintaining quality standards. The rubber industry, in particular, has stringent quality requirements, and without skilled personnel, it becomes difficult to meet these standards consistently. Finally, there is the issue of safety. Unskilled workers are more prone to accidents, which can have severe implications for both the workforce and the company's reputation. "Safety First" in skilling will be our aim!

Can you provide some quantifiable insights into how a skilled workforce can add value to the Indian manufacturing industry?

Absolutely. According to a TeamLease study, a skilled workforce can improve productivity by up to 20-30%. Improved productivity means faster turnaround times, better quality products, and increased capacity to take on more orders. This can enhance the industry's competitiveness in the global market. Furthermore, a skilled workforce can reduce wastage and operational costs by 10-15%, directly impacting profitability. On the innovation front, skilled workers can contribute to the development of new products and processes, which can lead to an increase in market share with less or zero rejection. Lastly, better-trained workers mean fewer accidents and lower downtime, which again translates to financial benefits.

With such clear benefits, why do you think the industry still struggles with a skill gap?

There are several reasons for this. First, there is a disconnect between the education system and industry requirements. The curriculum at many educational institutions are outdated and do not align with the current needs of the industry. Second, there is a lack of awareness and interest among the youth regarding careers in the rubber industry. This industry is often perceived as less glamorous compared to IT or finance sectors. Third, the rapid pace of technological advancement means that even the current workforce needs continuous upskilling, which is a resource-intensive process. Finally, there is the challenge of funding. Many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the rubber sector find it difficult to invest in comprehensive training programs.

What steps do you think can be taken to bridge this skill gap?

Bridging the skill gap requires a multi-faceted approach. First, we need to revamp our educational curriculum to align with industry needs. This involves a collaborative effort between educational institutions, industry bodies like AIRIA, and skill councils like RCPSDC. Second, we need to create more awareness about the opportunities in the rubber industry. This can be done through career fairs, industry visits, and internships that give students a real-world view of the industry. Third, continuous learning and upskilling should be encouraged through incentives and subsidies. Government support in the form of grants and tax benefits can help SMEs invest in training programs. Lastly, adopting technology in training can make the process more efficient and effective. Virtual reality, for example, can provide immersive training experiences without the risks associated with real-world training.

Technology indeed seems to be a game-changer. How do you see the role of digital transformation in the skill development landscape of the rubber industry?

Digital transformation has a pivotal role to play. It can democratize access to quality training resources. For instance, online learning platforms can provide courses and certifications that are accessible to anyone, anywhere. Technologies like artificial intelligence can be used to create personalized learning paths for individuals, ensuring that they get the most relevant training for their needs. Simulation and virtual reality can provide practical experience without the associated risks and costs. Moreover, digital tools can help in tracking and analyzing the progress of trainees, providing insights that can be used to further refine training programs. Embracing these technologies can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of skill development initiatives.

Given the importance of continuous learning, how can the rubber industry foster a culture of lifelong learning among its workforce?

Fostering a culture of lifelong learning requires commitment from both employers and employees. Employers need to recognize the value of continuous learning and provide the necessary resources and support. This includes setting up learning and development departments, offering training programs, and creating clear career progression paths that are linked to skill development. Employees, on the other hand, need to take ownership of their learning journey. This can be encouraged through initiatives like mentorship programs, where experienced workers guide new entrants, and by providing incentives such as promotions and pay raises linked to skill acquisition. Additionally, creating a supportive environment where learning is encouraged and failures are seen as opportunities for growth can help in nurturing a lifelong learning mindset.

Finally, what is your vision for the future of the rubber industry in India, particularly in terms of its workforce?

My vision is to see the Indian rubber industry become a global leader, not just in terms of production capacity but also in innovation and quality. A skilled workforce is crucial to achieving this vision specifically when BIS is setting standards for all types of rubber and rubber products. I envision an industry where continuous learning and upskilling are ingrained in the culture, where educational institutions and industries work hand-in-hand, and where every worker, from entry-level to senior management, has the skills and knowledge to contribute to their fullest potential. By investing in our

people, we can drive sustainable growth and make India a hub for high-quality rubber products that are recognized and respected worldwide.

I appeal to all the esteemed members associated with AIRIA & RCPSDC to let us know your manpower requirement and the fields such as moulding, mixing, testing, sheeting etc in order to assess and arrange skilling and upskilling your existing staff. Also let us know your requirement of additional staff with its job description in order to plan skilling schedule to cater the industry needs. ■



Mr Saif Mohammad
CEO, RCPSDC

'This marks the beginning of a transformative phase'

"After having been guided by our former Chairman, Mr. Vinod Patkotwar on a robust progress trajectory for the last two years; the President of the AIRIA, Mr. Shashi Kumar Singh has now become the Chairman of RCPSDC. This alignment marks the beginning of a transformative phase in our journey, fostering a robust partnership that promises to drive substantial progress in the industry. The collaboration between AIRIA and RCPSDC will address the critical need for skilled manpower in the rubber industry. For RCPSDC, this partnership offers a direct conduit to industry leaders, enabling us to fine-tune our training initiatives in real-time and stay ahead of industry trends. For AIRIA, aligning with RCPSDC enhances its mission of fostering industry growth by ensuring a steady pipeline of skilled professionals who can drive innovation and productivity. The collaboration will also facilitate rigorous assessments and certifications for trainers, assessors, and trainees, thereby maintaining the integrity and excellence of our training programs."