

# FACE TIME

Advances in technology and the desire for more sustainable workplaces has driven a need for higher laboratories standards. SEFA chairman *David Sutton* explains what this means

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**ACHEMA Inspire:** SEFA's influence has expanded widely in its 35 years of existence. What would you say has been its biggest effect on the industry?

**David Sutton:** Our most important activity has involved developing performance-based standards for laboratory furniture and related equipment. At the moment we have 12 different standards starting with fume hoods (SEFA-1) and ending with lab-grade seating (SEFA-12). We are currently developing the very first lab-grade standard for flooring used in the lab. These standards are followed worldwide and provide assurances to end-users and specifiers that the products are independently third-party tested. We feel so strongly in the use of laboratory grade products that every SEFA manufacturing member must provide proof that they make at least one product that is lab grade and complies with one of our standards.

We even went a step further and now list on our website all products by model number that have been third-party tested by our members. In this way the world can be assured that the products they are ordering have been tested and deemed laboratory grade by SEFA. This section [Member Product testing] is one of the most widely used parts of our site. By using lab grade products, we believe that the safest possible labs can be designed and equipped. As we like to point out, the letters SEFA spell only one word in English: "SAFE".

We are very selective in terms of members. We don't take just anyone who wants to pay. In the 1990s, we were rejecting up to 50 per cent of applicants because we only wanted established, knowledgeable people within the industry. This was

one of our best moves as it meant the Association only had the best experts on board. This was proved recently when we were shown a criterion for a large project in Kuwait, which specified that the company had to have been SEFA-approved for at least five years.

## THERE IS CONSTANT CONSIDERATION OF CONSERVING ENERGY AND SAFETY

*David Sutton*



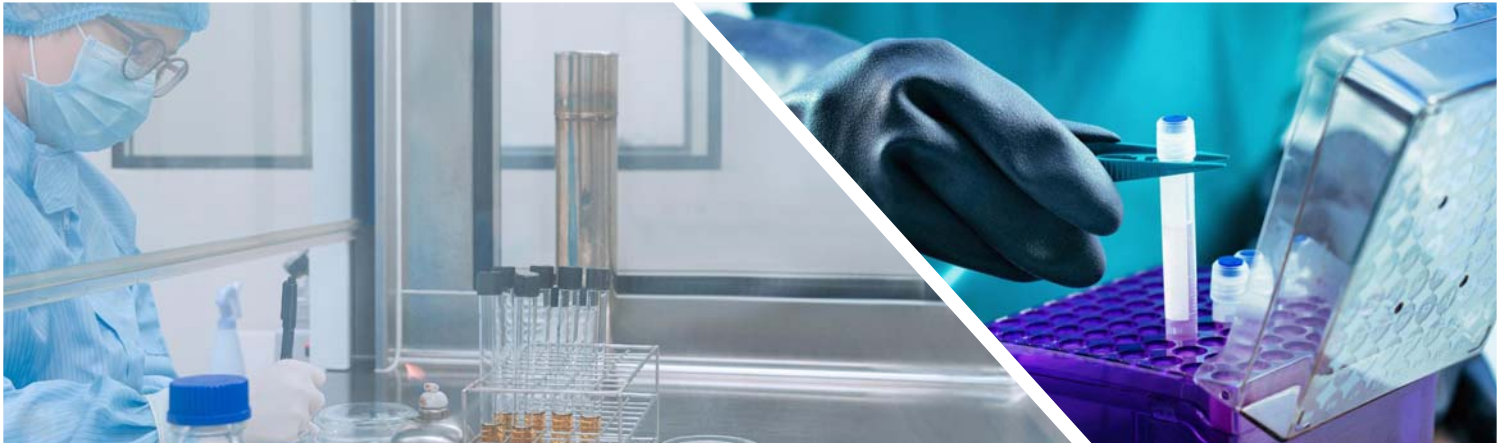
**ACHEMA Inspire:** How has the message on the use of sustainable materials, for example, been received?

**David Sutton:** Sustainability is very important to members and has become an increasingly crucial consideration in designing and specifying lab equipment. A laboratory building typically uses far



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more energy than other commercial buildings. Some of this has to do with the unique work being performed and the need to protect those working in them so there's constant consideration between the need to conserve energy and the occupant's safety. There is the same balancing act between the use of more sustainable materials and the need to provide the type of equipment that will survive the harsh environment found in a lab.

Our members are constantly considering these factors in the products they make and that effort will be ongoing. The new technologies coming into play - especially automation - will, no doubt help with the sustainability factors. Because of Covid, SEFA has seen an increase in speed within laboratories and the changes they need to make to keep up to date, and most importantly safe.

**ACHEMA Inspire:** Having said that, we are now seeing huge advances in automation. What challenges does that pose in terms of regulation?

**David Sutton:** With the use of robots to perform certain tasks the danger to workers is alleviated in that there will be areas in a lab where workers will not necessarily be exposed to harm. While you will most likely think of automation within the laboratories themselves, we also have to look at how this automation will help scientists to work remotely.

We would hope that government regulations will take this factor into account when addressing the automation of lab work. We will be looking for experts at ACHEMA who understand the next generation of laboratories that can come on board and help to set future SEFA standards. This is our main project that we hope will be ready for ACHEMA 2026.

**ACHEMA Inspire:** We've also seen new levels of innovation since Covid. How important are such changing environments in supporting this?

**David Sutton:** Covid and the stunningly quick discovery of effective vaccines through Operation Warp Speed is revolutionising the R&D process for the discovery of new pharmaceuticals. Our members have experienced exponential growth in the demand for new lab spaces throughout the world as a result.

Innovation in the design, construction and furnishing labs is taking place, including converting unused office buildings into lab spaces. As many people have observed, "adaptive reuse" is an important consideration in reaching

sustainability goals. Covid increased the demand for the industry, and this has seen more laboratories being set up in new countries, especially India. From now until ACHEMA 2026 SEFA will be focusing on bringing in standards for the design of laboratories. We will also be focusing on events there because of the increase of the industry in India.

## WE WILL BE LOOKING FOR EXPERTS WHO CAN HELP SET FUTURE SEFA STANDARDS

*David Sutton*



**ACHEMA Inspire:** Given all the pace of change, what sort of laboratory do you think we will be seeing at ACHEMA 2026?

**David Sutton:** Our main aim is to expand SEFA on the worldwide platform and get on board the experts needed to cater for the changes that we will see over the next few years. So, at the next ACHEMA event we will be seeing more automation and the use of smart lab technology to monitor safety systems and the work within a lab. SEFA will also bring in a safety standard for these changes. It will certainly make for a very informative event and our members are all looking forward to being able to see all the incredible changes that are happening at the moment.

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