

# LEADING FORWARD

Achim Dries recently celebrated four years as president of PEMA. He spoke to *DLM* about his successes to date, the key challenges facing his organisation's members and the future of the industry.

Achim Dries won the PEMA presidency in June 2021. Occurring at the height of the Covid pandemic, it was a digital election, which proved fitting as digitalisation has become a major trend for PEMA members. And Dries brings the perfect skill set, as he is also CEO and managing director of VAHLE Group. "My experience at VAHLE has been instrumental in shaping my leadership at PEMA," he says. "VAHLE's focus on delivering innovative, reliable power and data transmission solutions for port equipment aligns closely with PEMA's mission - to drive the advancement of port equipment technology and promote collaboration across the industry."



Achim Dries

## Digital trend

At VAHLE, he says he has witnessed firsthand the importance of integrating sustainability, digitalisation and safety into equipment design and operation. "This perspective helps me guide PEMA's efforts to foster knowledge-sharing, standardisation and best practices that benefit all members," he adds.

PEMA's core aim - to facilitate cooperation among manufacturers, operators and service providers to create safer, smarter and more sustainable port equipment - is a mission he deeply shares. "Bringing VAHLE's technical expertise and market insight to the association allows me to support members navigating the industry's complex challenges and accelerating innovation."

He believes that digitalisation is the backbone of future-proof port operations. "From VAHLE's perspective, the key issues include data integration across legacy systems, cybersecurity, and the lack of common standards. Many terminals still operate in silos, missing out on the efficiency gains that real-time data and connectivity can offer."

"To accelerate the transition, the industry must invest in open, interoperable platforms

and foster collaboration between technology providers, operators, and regulators. At PEMA, we support this by encouraging best practice sharing and aligning on digital strategies that enable smarter, safer and more efficient cargo handling."

## Green imperative

Of course, the other major topic for PEMA members is sustainability. "Sustainability is no longer a future goal - it's a present-day imperative," says Achim. Key trends include electrification of port equipment, automation for greater energy efficiency and digital monitoring to optimise resource use. "At PEMA, we see strong momentum towards shore power, emission-free container handling and circular economy models," he adds.

He highlights how PEMA actively drives these trends by facilitating knowledge exchange among members, supporting technical standards and promoting innovation through collaboration. "By connecting manufacturers, operators and stakeholders, we help shape a more sustainable and resilient port industry."

## Multiple challenges

In addition to these major trends, port equipment manufacturers are having to navigate several other challenges at once. "Beyond sustainability and digitalisation, our members are contending with growing geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain disruptions and workforce shortages," says Achim. "Additionally, navigating complex regulations and ensuring system interoperability remain key challenges."

"Two emerging areas demand particular attention: cybersecurity and the evolving fire protection standards for electric vehicles and equipment. As ports embrace automation and electrification, safeguarding operational technology from cyber threats becomes critical. Likewise, battery-powered equipment introduces new fire risks that require updated safety standards and risk management protocols."

For cybersecurity, Achim fundamentally believes that it must be considered from the very start when designing new equipment. This is especially true for companies designing machinery such as spreaders, which are increasingly vulnerable to cyber threats as technology advances. "There are standards existing with the need to be included in the design process of R&D. This is to be designed against robust attacks," he says.

PEMA will publish an information paper covering the topic of cybersecurity this summer. Additionally, Achim feels that adoption of battery-powered technologies in port terminals significantly alters traditional risk assessments, as battery fires require a completely different response than those involving diesel engines. He highlights that this transition demands careful planning and major adjustments.

"They have to have a different layout of the terminals to make sure they can really handle a fire," he says. "You cannot just take



existing fire protection systems and ask the fire brigade to help - even there, there is still a lack of competency."

During PEMA's recent AGM in Gdansk, the audience saw an expert presentation on the necessary measures for managing battery fires effectively. The organisation is now going a step further, by introducing better guidelines for members.

"Battery-powered equipment introduces new fire hazards that require updated risk assessments and safety protocols," says Achim. "PEMA is actively addressing this by developing industry guidelines and best practices to help operators manage these emerging risks effectively. Our collaborative approach ensures that safety standards evolve in line with technological advancements, maintaining the safety and reliability of port operations."

Both the cybersecurity paper and guidance on battery fires form part of PEMA's growing library of white papers and information briefs, providing concrete guidance on some of the industry's most pressing challenges.

## Continued growth

PEMA's new tagline launched at its AGM is 'Connecting Minds. Leading the Industry'. This underlines the association's commitment to collaboration, innovation, representation and education.



An expert presentation about battery fires at PEMA's AGM in Gdansk.

Established in 2004, PEMA has served as a platform and collective public voice for the worldwide port equipment and technology industries. Over its 21 years, the association has seen significant expansion, with membership now standing at 120 companies. Today, its members encompass a broad range of the sector internationally, including manufacturers of cranes, port equipment and components, providers of automation, software and technology, as well as consultants and other industry specialists.

"Since taking on the presidency, I've seen PEMA grow not just in membership numbers, but in influence and technical output," says Achim. "We've welcomed new members from across the globe, reflecting the increasing diversity and innovation in the port equipment sector."

He cites the key benefit of PEMA membership as access - to knowledge, to networks and to a neutral platform for shaping the future of the industry. "Our white papers, working groups and outreach initiatives help members stay ahead of regulatory, technological and market trends," he adds.

PEMA members gain exclusive access to beneficial resources as part of their membership. This includes market surveys and reports, informational white papers, technical committee participation, meetings and workshops, insightful data reports and expert presentations.

Recent paper topics include: Battery and Charging Solutions In Ports and Terminals; Laser Technology in Port Terminals; Fire Detection and Suppression Systems for Mobile Port Equipment; and Diesel and Alternative Power, with more to come this year. PEMA also publishes an annual global survey of STS container crane deliveries, now in its 12th year.

Achim also highlights an additional benefit - a connected networking environment. "Of course, many of our members are also

competitors," he says. "But that's precisely where PEMA's strength lies - we provide a trusted space where collaboration serves a higher purpose - advancing global standards, improving safety and accelerating the transition to smarter, greener ports. We focus on shared challenges, not commercial advantage, and that spirit of mutual progress is what keeps our association strong."

## Future outlook

Despite being beset by multiple challenges, PEMA's members retain an optimistic outlook - albeit with a note of caution. "Sentiment among our members is cautiously positive," says Achim.

"Long-term catalysts - decarbonisation, digitalisation, resilient global trade - continue to drive demand for new equipment and upgrades. However, economic volatility, geopolitical tension and supply chain uncertainty are prompting measured forecasting and disciplined capital allocation."

In Europe, port equipment seems set to be a beneficiary of the EU's Readiness 2030 strategy, launched in March. In total, up to €800bn is pledged to enhance defence and dual-use infrastructure, including ports and logistics hubs. In addition, a joint EU-Nato assessment in June identified strategic ports vulnerable in a possible conflict. The EU proposed up to €75bn over the next EU budget to upgrade transport and port infrastructure in these areas.

"These developments mean port equipment investments are now deeply entwined with EU goals," says Achim. "That alignment brings stronger public support and co-funding, which reduces risk and reinforces confidence."

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