

Keynote Presentation

John Stine, Commissioner, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

Commissioner Stine discussed efforts in Minnesota to advance a green chemistry agenda and the important role of government policy in making this happen. The current “Better Minnesota Vision” is an excellent rallying cry for green chemistry.

MPCA was created to clean up impacts from chemical spills. The agency is adapting to a younger generation that wants to move from cleaning up unsustainable practices to advancing more sustainable solutions. Policy is a critical driver for moving green chemistry into the mainstream, starting with better data and public information on chemical hazards. While understanding the chemicals used in a product and their potential impacts is a good first step, there is a need to acknowledge that there will always be uncertainty about the impacts of chemicals on health and ecosystems. This scientific uncertainty needs to be linked to consideration of safer alternatives.

Minnesota is uniquely situated to be a leader in green chemistry. It has substantial biomass availability, significant private capital, low unemployment rate, good tax structures, and successful collaborations of academics, government, and industry to promote green chemistry. However, there is not sufficient funding to provide companies with necessary technical assistance or research funding. Forward-looking companies are the exception rather than the rule.

An ecosystem model of safer chemicals innovation is needed that identifies the most effective ways for government to leverage efforts to advance green chemistry. It is important to acknowledge the role of government policy in helping industry to move forward. Such policy reform is not happening at the federal level and it is up to states to move beyond the chemical-by-chemical approach to a more integrated vision. Earlier assumptions of how change happens or the value of certain policies or approaches may need to be reconsidered.