

SOCOMORE Japan

Providing French Surface Treatment, Coating, and Adhesion Technologies Expanding Industry Demand through Collaboration with Local Companies

SOCOMORE Japan is the Japanese subsidiary of SOCOMORE, a company headquartered in Vannes, France. It imports and sells chemical products such as surface treatments for aircraft, special coatings that meet US MIL specifications, and paint remover for bridges. SOCOMORE Japan expanded into Yokohama City in August 2018, and has been selling paint remover purchased overseas for use on bridges and aircraft in Japan. Making use of IDEC Yokohama's program for supporting the business establishment by overseas companies, in September 2023 SOCOMORE Japan concluded an agreement with a local company that will provide contract manufacturing.



Speaker: Nakaba Kobayashi, President



SOCOMORE Japan's cleaning products

■ From Bridges to Aircraft, and Industrial Applications

Coatings applied to aircraft bodies are usually recoated every six to seven years. Coatings can be damaged by the effects of UV rays and other factors, and excessive buildup of grime on the surface can increase friction resistance, which degrades fuel efficiency. SOCOMORE Japan manufactures and sells paint removers that remove the old coatings via chemical treatment before repainting the aircraft.

In another application, many of the bridges in Japan were built in the 1970s and 1980s, and use coatings from that period, which include lead-based antirust primers and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB)-based coatings. When these coatings were recognized as being problematic about 10 years ago, SOCOMORE improved its paint removers for aircraft use, and began to supply them as products for bridge maintenance.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, soaring global raw materials prices and transportation costs have made reducing logistics costs and CO2 emissions a challenge. To meet these challenges, in November 2022, SOCOMORE Japan began looking at securing a manufacturing base in Japan.

■ Business Matching with a Chemical Manufacturer inside Yokohama city

I was looking for a contract manufacturer in Japan for products such as surface treatment chemicals (paint removers) for bridges and aircraft. The Company is located in Shin-Yokohama, and we decided to utilize IDEC Yokohama's Manufacturing Coordination Program for business

matching between companies. With support from a coordinator, including introductions to companies in Yokohama, we conducted several interviews that resulted in a partnership with Yokohama Oils & Fats Industry Co., Ltd., which will provide contract manufacturing of paint remover in Japan. After several prototypes of paint remover and other products, we concluded an agreement for paint remover manufacture in September. We have also partnered with local Japanese companies for sales.

There were several candidates for contract manufacturing providers, including out-of-prefecture companies. However, we found that Yokohama Oils & Fats Industry has the technological capability to manufacture paint remover that meets our requirements. Moreover, since it is also located in Yokohama City, it is convenient to visit, enabling close communication.

■ Attractive Proposals for Improvement from Japanese Manufacturers

I have personally worked in a telecommunications equipment manufacturer in Japan before working at a European chemical manufacturer for 15 years, and I have been involved in collaboration with companies in Japan, including on the need for quality management of chemicals. In this collaboration with Yokohama Oils & Fats Industry, I noticed their thorough approach to quality management and their attitude of trying to make improvements themselves. It was very attractive to receive their proactive proposals for revision to the manufacturing process and so forth. Another characteristic that I think is typical of Japanese manufacturers is their strong commitment to keeping



delivery deadlines.

Shin-Yokohama is a great location. Nagoya is only 1.5 hours away on the shinkansen, while access to Haneda Airport is also excellent. In addition, the station area is not as crowded as Tokyo Station, making it very convenient for transport. Yokohama was originally one of the areas opened to foreign companies, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic I was a frequent participant in business networking events.

In terms of developing our business in Japan, we are expecting to see demand expand for aircraft and industrial applications. Now that we have secured a collaborating factory and set up a production system in Japan, our next task is to develop the next generation of management personnel.

(Interview date: October 2023)