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Chemical Industry Looks to Collaborative Efforts for the Future of R&D

Washington, D.C. – March 2, 2001 – The chemical industry took steps towards making its future more certain when industry leaders gathered at a meeting of the Chemical Industry Vision2020 Technology Partnership last week. The Vision2020 Partnership is an industry-led process to accelerate innovation and technology development by leveraging technical expertise and financial resources. Last week's meeting represents part of the chemical industry's recent efforts to reinvigorate Vision2020 partnerships and explore new strategic directions. The session took place on Monday, February 19, at the Washington Hilton and Towers as part of the 4th Industrial Energy Efficiency Symposium and Exposition.

Achieving growth through collaborative efforts was the key theme of the meeting. Jack Solomon, Director of Technology Planning at Praxair, presented results from the CCR-led study "Productivity of Chemical Research and Development" that emphasized the significant rewards of R&D investments. Solomon called on Vision2020 to expand its influence over federal funding through pre-competitive collaborative projects. Speakers and members of the audience expressed their enthusiasm for joint efforts. "We did not embrace collaboration in the twentieth century," Richard Gross, VP and Director of R&D at Dow Chemical Company, said. "Vision2020 is a cornerstone of what we have to do in the twenty-first century."

The highlight of the session featured a roundtable of chemical industry CTOs during which panelists identified specific industry challenges and pre-competitive R&D that could be pursued with broad industry support. Joseph Miller of Dupont moderated the roundtable with participants from Air Products, BP Amoco, Dow Chemical, DuPont, Equistar, General Electric, and Praxair. Computational and modeling technologies as well as improved unit operations were among the topics most identified by panelists for possible collaborative efforts. The roundtable participants also mentioned biotechnology, analysis, and e-business as high-priority areas. "I've noticed a lot of commonalities during the roundtable," said Steve Lerner, VP at Praxair, "and we should take the opportunity to move the industry forward." Tom Manuel, formerly of the CCR, also noted the importance of common interests. "My sense is that now we need to focus on specifics, and we've got a lot of support."

During the meeting, Earl Beaver, CTO at Bridges to Sustainability, also proposed the Vision2020 R&D competition concept, the Chemical Vision2020 Challenge. As part of the Challenge, Vision2020 companies would pool resources and offer financial incentives in order to broaden the range of expertise available to help solve industry's toughest technical problems. Several possible topics for the Challenge were proposed—improvements in unit operations and technologies to reduce energy consumption by 30 percent received the most votes from the audience.

The Vision2020 meeting was sponsored by the American Chemical Society, the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, the Council for Chemical Research, and the Department of Energy (DOE). Over 143 chemical companies have participated in Vision2020 activities along with 70 universities, 12 national labs, 10 government agencies, and 5 professional organizations. To date, Vision2020 has leveraged \$72 million through 50-50 chemical industry/DOE cost-shares. To learn more, visit the new Chemical Vision2020 Technology Partnership web site at www.chemicalvision2020.org.

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