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History:

The Sterile Barrier Association (SBA) is an influential global trade association for companies who produce Sterile Barrier Systems for the healthcare industry around the world.

Sterile Barrier Systems are sophisticated barrier materials which allow single use medical devices and products to be sterilised after manufacture, and then to maintain that sterility up to the point of use.

The SBA was formerly known as ESPA, the European Sterilisation Packaging Association. ESPA was established in 1992.

The Association was formed to bring together key players to:

- Promote this very important sector of the healthcare industry, producing sterile barrier products which help to prevent infection to patients.
- Assist in creating a positive environment to drive innovation in the technology associated with the production of sterile barrier systems.
- Promote the highest product standards and manufacturing excellence.

The Association's name was changed to the Sterile Barrier Association in 2004. The main reason for the name change was member's strong belief that the description "packaging" did not adequately describe the highly technical products and services provided by members, and the increasing global presence of members.

The SBA is a non-profit making organisation.

Key objectives:

- To maintain, promote and seek to improve the product quality and quality standards relating to the manufacture and supply of single use sterilisation barrier systems to the healthcare industry.
- To provide a forum within which manufacturers of such products and services can discuss issues relevant to the industry.
- To consider all legislative measures and proposals that may affect the industry and agree proposals to address.
- To establish and maintain links with for example European and non-European legislative and regulatory bodies, related trade associations, and users, and to cooperate with such organisations as necessary on any matter which may affect the industry.
- To promote and influence the harmonisation of standards, practices, and procedures within our industry in Europe, and to endeavour to extend that influence into other non-European regions.
- To act as the European industry voice for Sterile Barrier Systems on all relevant matters and at all levels.

Value of being a member:

- Being in a trade association where members have a reputation for supplying high quality, fit for purpose products, and high levels of service.
- Being in a trade association whose companies are recognised as having the credibility and knowledge of supplying sterile barrier systems to the healthcare industry.
- Being able to exchange experiences and information with fellow producers and suppliers.
- Having the opportunity to put forward ideas and comments to bodies responsible for the forming of legislation and standards.
- Having a common voice in lobbying.
- Being part of an organisation, which publishes papers and carries out projects on issues of common interest and benefit.
- Having the capability to better promote the value of sterile barrier systems.
- Being better able to develop and deliver educational packages, such as the correct procedures to be adopted to ensure that when SBS are removed at the point of use, sterility is not compromised.
- Benefitting from SBA commissioned market studies which only members have access to.
- Being able to better develop alliances with users and patient groups and give assistance as appropriate.

Members:

The majority of members are long established and experienced international companies supplying to medical device manufacturers and hospitals around the world.

The Association has developed to include members from Europe, countries that border Europe, and the USA. Member companies operate in various stages of the supply chain, many manufacturing sterile barriers, others producing raw materials such as medical grade papers and inks, providing sterilising services, and manufacturers of processing equipment.

This all adds up to a large industry group committed to ensuring that, in partnership with their customers, they continually develop and improve products and services essential for “protecting the patient”, the association’s primary objective.

The current members collectively supply some 80% of the market demand for sterile barrier systems in Europe, and along with their significant sales and manufacturing facilities around the rest of the world, have a strong presence in the global market. Member companies are highly experienced with very good reputations and are able to invest significant funds into researching new innovative products.

A major and very essential mission for the SBA is to provide experts to participate in the process of forming legislation and new standards, and communicating with bodies and organisations responsible for, or having an influence on the outcome of these aspects. This is all done in the pursuit of continual improvement and supporting customers and end users and demonstrates the SBAs determination to do all that is required to ensure patient safety remains the top priority when developing or changing legislation and standards.

Members are always seeking to find more effective methods of providing information and educating customers and end users, and key to achieving this is the ongoing enhancement of the SBA website. The SBA welcomes requests from all sources on how this can be improved upon.

SBA Forums:

Only members of the SBA are eligible to attend forums.

Members meet twice per year, typically in Spring and Autumn, for a two-day conference, when a range of mutually relevant topics are discussed, such as regulatory and environmental, progress of SBA projects, public relations, new initiatives, concerns etc. Guest speakers are invited to the meetings to present on a variety of topics of relevance to the industry.

Prospective members are invited to attend a conference in order to meet members to discuss the objectives and the achievements of the SBA, and to be able to ask questions in order to assist in deciding whether to join the SBA. Potential members are also asked to make a short presentation to outline their business and products.

Meeting venues are typically within Europe.

There is a SBA Board of Directors, comprising of up to eight members, with one member being elected Chairman by fellow directors. The Director General of the SBA also attends Board meetings. Board members are from member companies and are elected to the Board by the full membership at a general meeting.

Board members undertake their roles on a non-expense basis. The Director General is responsible to the Board for managing the day to day activities and finances of the SBA, and is paid a fee for these services.

The Board meets four times per year.

Eligibility for membership:

Requirements for membership are:

1. To be a manufacturer of sterilisation products or provide relevant services.
2. To have an internationally recognised quality system.
3. To nominate a senior representative to attend annual conferences and extraordinary meetings.
4. On occasions to nominate and support specialists from their own companies to participate in the SBA working groups.

Membership of a new company is decided by a vote at one of the biannual conferences, requiring 67% of members present to vote in favour.

Annual membership fee:

There is just one membership category, being full membership. The current fee (2022) is 6,000 Euros per annum. The amount of the annual fee is approved by the full membership.