NIMS and Four Chemical Companies to Develop a Framework for Promoting Open Innovation
—Further Enhancing Polymer Material Performance by Addressing Issues Common to Chemical Companies, with NIMS Playing a Pivotal Role—

The National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS) (headquartered in Tsukuba, Ibaraki; Kazuhito Hashimoto, President), Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, Sumitomo Chemical Company, Ltd., Asahi Kasei Corporation, and Mitsui Chemicals, Inc. signed a memorandum of understanding on the operation of the Materials Open Platform (MOP) on June 19, 2017. The MOP initiative is expected to promote open innovation in the chemical industry.

Abstract

Dramatic changes in the industrial environment driven by the development of AI, big data and IoT are making it difficult for individual manufacturers to engage in basic research leading to transformational innovations in materials ensuring international competitiveness. Chemical companies often share similar medium- to long-term issues that are difficult for them to address alone. The goal of the MOP is to respond to these common issues by developing fundamental technologies leading to innovation by facilitating large-scale collaboration across the chemical industry in Japan. The MOP will also support the global competitiveness of Japanese chemical companies by promoting the pursuit of bilateral collaboration to leverage research accomplishments produced by MOP initiatives for their specific needs. In addition, the MOP will work to resolve the various global issues Japan is facing.

NIMS and the four chemical companies aim to further enhance the performance of polymer materials in FY2017 under the MOP framework. To achieve this, they will jointly gather data on various aspects of polymer materials, such as their structures, physical properties and alterations. They will then analyze the data using materials informatics.
Contact:

<Regarding the MOP>
Izumi Ichinose
Materials Open Platform for Chemistry, External Collaboration Division
National Institute for Materials Science
Tel: +81-29-860-4489
Email: ICHINOSE.Izumi@nims.go.jp

<For general inquiries>
Public Relations Office
National Institute for Materials Science
Tel: +81-29-859-2026, Fax: +81-29-859-2017
Email: pressrelease@ml.nims.go.jp

Public Relations and Investor Relations Office
Mitsubishi Chemical Holdings Corporation
Tel: +81-3-6748-7140

Corporate Communications Dept.
Sumitomo Chemical Company, Ltd.
Tel: +81-3-5543-5102

Corporate Communications
Asahi Kasei Corporation
Tel: +81-3-3296-3008

Corporate Communications Div.
Mitsui Chemicals, Inc.
Tel: +81-3-6253-2100
Outline of the Materials Open Platform (MOP) to be implemented by NIMS and the chemical industry

June 19, 2017

National Institute for Materials Science
President Kazuhiro Hashimoto

Society 5.0 (super-smart society)

Super-smart society: a society resulting from the elaborate integration of cyberspace and physical space
Society 5.0 (super-smart society) service platform

Data accumulation, extraction and application

Service platform for Society 5.0 (super-smart society)

Functional and integrated services

Cloud

Internet

System A

System B

Data accumulation, extraction and application

Fundamental technology

Fundamental software-related technology

Cybersecurity

Big data analysis technology

AI technology

Device technology

Network technology

Fundamental cyberspace-related technology

Network technology

Fundamental technology related to physical space

Actuators

Sensors

Human interfaces

Robotics

These materials were prepared by partially revising the materials distributed at the fourth CSTI meeting to discuss how to promote fundamental technologies, held on October 19, 2015.

Industry expectations for universities and national R&D institutes

Transforming industry-academia collaboration from “individual-to-organization collaboration” to “organization-to-organization collaboration”

Industry will increase investment in, information sharing and personnel exchanges with universities and R&D institutes, if organization-to-organization collaboration frameworks similar to those in Europe and the US can be built.

Investments to strengthen educational and research foundations

Universities R&D institutes

Provisioning high-quality research results and dispatching highly-skilled researchers

Source: The February 16, 2016 report of the Japan Business Federation
R&D institutes will play a greater role in facilitating collaboration.

Missions of designated national R&D institutes (source: MEXT website)

1. Provide strong leadership for Japan’s innovation system by creating venues which bring together human resources from industry, academia and government, as well as knowledge and funding.
2. Promote the production, popularization and use of world-class R&D accomplishments.
NIMS proposition: New framework for industry-government-academia collaboration
—Open innovation at NIMS through collaboration between private companies in same industrial sector—

[Combining horizontal and vertical collaboration]

Involving as many companies as possible
Japanese industry will increase R&D investment efficiency (thereby strengthening international competitiveness)

Materials Open Platform (MOP)
—Developing a venue for transformational innovations in materials: linking basic research with the needs of private companies—

- NIMS has received vast amounts of investment from the national government. It should therefore effectively use these national resources to secure Japan’s international competitiveness.
- NIMS, as a designated national R&D institute, will establish industrial-sector-specific open platforms to facilitate collaboration between industries and universities to carry out mid- to long-term R&D projects leading to transformational innovations.
- The key to the success of an open platform is determining attractive, far-sighted research themes. If industry, academia and governments join force to pursue these themes, their efforts can be expected to strengthen the competitiveness of Japanese industry.

NIMS determined MOP research themes in the chemical field after holding 27 discussion sessions with chemical companies.

- Development into bilateral (exclusive) collaboration
- Participation of universities and research institutes throughout Japan
- Meeting the needs of users
- Collaboration
- Mid- to long-term R&D
- Dramatic increase in R&D investment efficiency
- Effective use of data science (MI*)
- Common research themes for the first fiscal year:
  (1) Gathering basic data on polymers
  (2) Structuring databases and estimating physical properties of materials using MI*

* MI: materials informatics (a field of study wherein big data is applied to materials research)
Projects subject to collaboration and competition

**Projects subject to collaboration**

- Acquisition of basic data
  - Reliability, openness, standardization
- Advanced technology to analyze physical properties and structures of materials
- Computational science
  - Simulation, modelling, materials informatics
- Use of AI

Collaborators jointly hold rights to properties produced under the MOP in the chemical field.

**Projects subject to competition (bilateral collaboration)**

- Material design based on intended usage
  - Enhancement and optimization of multiple functions
- Safety, reliability, environmental adaptability
- Production simulator
  - Predicting the methods of efficiently manufacturing high-quality products, taking account of the fundamental physical properties of raw materials.
- Creation of next-generation products using the IoT

Each company will decide its own direction in line with its business strategy.

* Rules concerning the competition that follows the completion of chemical MOP projects will be determined in future discussions.

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**Future prospects of the Materials Open Platform in the chemical field**

[Expected effect of pursuing the FY2017 common themes]

Enhanced polymer material performance may offer potential solutions to some global issues and bring about dramatic and positive future changes in society.

- **Lighter and stronger polymers** ⇒ Fuel-efficient automobiles and aircraft
- **Polymers that absorb optical, thermal, vibrational or sound energy** ⇒ Comfortable clothing and living spaces
- **Polymers capable of controlling gas or ion permeability** ⇒ Advanced medical treatments, solutions to agricultural/food problems, and the development of energy/water resources

NIMS and the four participating companies will lead the creation of new paradigms in the chemical industry by researching various types of materials. The goal of this initiative is to bring wealth and comfort to society in the future.