



Industrial competitors can share knowledge

Setting aside the clichés of cutthroat competition between industrial rivals, cement manufacturers in the European research network Nanocem felt the need to join forces in order to share knowledge and accelerate research, for the greater benefit of all.

***Professor KAREN SCRIVENER,
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology
in Lausanne (EPFL), director of the Building
Materials department and coordinator
of the Nanocem network***

Nanocem, a European research network created in 2004, has successfully managed to get twelve European cement and related products manufacturers – including Lafarge – and 21 academic institutions to work together. Nanocem's goal is to associate corporate R&D with academic scientific research to develop a better understanding of construction materials. "Cement and concrete are the most widely used materials in the world, but they are still very poorly understood," observes Professor Karen Scrivener, coordinator of the Nanocem network. "By combining our efforts and resources we have a range of tools and expertise that is rarely found within any one, single laboratory. It enables us to analyze and understand the fundamental mechanisms behind the behavior of materials." Nanocem harnesses the latest technology to study the microstructure of materials. "Corporate partners finance the work of scientists, who focus their research on projects that are likely to yield technologies that can be transferred to the cement industry," explains Professor Scrivener. "Our ambition is to build a knowledge database for developing new materials and to improve existing ones, but also to ensure that cement and concrete are finally recognized as sustainable, high technology materials."