

Model letter

Insert your contact information here

Date

Dear Sir/Madam,

As required by the new European law on chemicals, REACH, I would like you to inform me about the presence of any chemical from the "Candidate List of substances of very high concern" in the product _____ or its packaging.

If any of these harmful chemicals are present, the law requires that you name them, and give me sufficient information to allow safe use of the product, within 45 days.

I would be grateful if you would also tell me about what other harmful chemicals may be in this product, and what you are doing to offer this or similar products which don't contain them. If you would like to do more to identify harmful chemicals, please use the REACH S.I.N. List 1.0 (www.sinlist.org) and the European Trade Unions Priority List (www.etuc.org/r/830). For more information on your obligations under REACH, please find your National Help Desk here: http://echa.europa.eu/reach/helpdesk/national_help_contact_en.asp

Sincerely,

cc:

1. European Chemicals Agency, P.O. Box 400, 00121 Helsinki, FINLAND
2. European or national consumer or environmental organisation

Download this letter (multiple EU languages) here:
<http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?rubrique111>

If you don't get an answer within 45 days, you can contact your government ministry in charge of REACH. See here:
<http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?rubrique111>

Some companies have already begun to identify harmful chemicals in their products, and are working to replace them with safer alternatives: whether this is with safer chemicals, different product designs or manufacturing processes.

For more information, see
<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/reports/chemical-home-company-progress>

Further Reading

- Comic Book in English and French: Choosing Our Future
- Breast cancer and chemicals – in several EU languages
- Plastics and Bisphenol A – English consumer guide
- More about REACH - English, Spanish, French, German
- How REACH affects our health – in 7 EU languages

Take Action

Help stop the use of harmful chemicals through our online actions

Stay Informed

- Get the latest news on REACH
- Read our regular Chemicals and Disease News Bulletin
- Contact us: info@env-health.org

This leaflet is part of the **Chemicals Health Monitor Project**, conducted by the Health and Environment Alliance in collaboration with partner organisations across Europe. The project aims to improve public health by ensuring that key scientific evidence on the links between chemicals and ill-health are translated into policy as quickly as possible.
See www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org.

February 2009 Edition.

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
28 Blvd Charlemagne, 1000 Brussels, BELGIUM

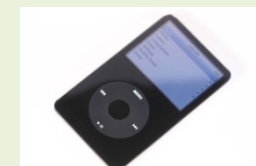


The Health and Environment Alliance gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Marisla Foundation and the European Commission, DG Environment. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the funders and the EU institutions.

Pictures: Copyright © freerangestock, <http://www.freerangestock.com/>

Harmful chemicals in products you buy?

Your right to know!



This brochure is available from Chemicals Health Monitor at
www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org

Harmful chemicals: how are you affected?

Scientific evidence has been emerging for some time that exposures to some 'industrial' chemicals are linked to various health effects, such as allergies, learning disabilities, some cancers, infertility and other reproductive problems. Exposure can come through the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the whole environment we live in - both indoors and outdoors - and the products we use. For example, when we breathe in, household or office dust which carries chemicals that have come off or out of products gets into our bodies. We also breathe in chemicals in the form of vapours (e.g. the new sofa or mattress smell). And our skin absorbs chemicals directly too (e.g. from vapours or lotions).

Harmful industrial chemicals are present in many daily-use items such as personal care and cosmetic products, fragrances, household cleaning products, furniture, electronics, mattresses, carpets, wires, textiles, lighting, kitchen utensils and pots, food storage containers, clothes, office supplies, toys... What's more, they are rarely on the product labels; or the label has many chemicals listed, and it's hard to know which may be harmful.

Given that prevention is better and cheaper than dealing with the potential negative health effects, the fewer harmful chemicals used in consumer products, the better. We clearly don't want to be exposed, but first we need to know which harmful chemicals are used to make products we buy, and how they could harm us.

Protecting yourself by using your right to know

A **new chemicals system in Europe called REACH** became law in mid-2007. Despite its weaknesses, it does give European consumers the "right to know" about the most harmful chemicals in products. When you ask, companies are obliged to tell you within 45 days if a product contains chemicals which are on REACH's 'most harmful' list. The company must also give you enough information so that you can use the item safely. You can request the information before or after buying a product. So now you can make better informed choices about what you buy, and how to use it. By asking, you will show companies that you prefer to buy safer products. On the back of this leaflet is a model letter to request information from a company. Take it with you when you go shopping: fill it in, sign and give it to the retailer or send to the manufacturer.

Under REACH, companies are only obliged to tell you about the chemicals which are on the 'most harmful' list. But the REACH system has only just started slowly drawing up that list - it is still very short. The longer the list, the more information you will receive about what is really in products. When you ask companies about harmful chemicals, this also shows the regulators that the public is concerned about chemical safety, and encourages governments to quickly put other harmful chemicals on the list. Please tell us what answers you receive from companies: info@env-health.org.

How can you influence companies to make safer products?

Using your "right to know" also gives you an important opportunity to help change how companies make products, what they put in them, and even the kinds of products available in shops. Public pressure works, often faster than regulation. Companies need to know that people want safer products now. You can encourage companies to move away from harmful chemicals, and to develop and use safer alternatives. Civil society and trade union organisations have made lists of harmful chemicals, based on REACH criteria. Ask companies to use these lists to identify and replace harmful chemicals.



To help get the REACH law working more quickly and to identify chemicals which need replacing, the International Chemical Secretariat (ChemSec) launched the **S.I.N. (Substitute It Now) List 1.0**, containing **267** chemicals. These chemicals meet the REACH criteria for the most harmful chemicals.

www.sinlist.org

HIDDEN DANGERS: Examples of chemicals in consumer products that are often not on the label!

Phthalates (DEHP, DBP, BBP) Di-ethylhexyl phthalate; dibutyl phthalate, benzyl butyl phthalate

Properties: toxic to reproduction.

Health effects*: may be related to problems with children's reproductive system, may disrupt hormone system.

Products: cosmetics, shampoos, moisturisers, fragrances, some older children's toys (not in newer toys), textiles, carpets, furniture, plastic packaging, car interiors, baby changing mattresses, flooring, shower curtains and other items from polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

Brominated flame retardants (Deca BDE, Penta BDE, HBCDD) Deca / Penta bromodiphenyl ether, hexabromocyclododecane

Properties: resist breaking down in environment (persistent), can build up in the body (bioaccumulative), may be toxic.

Health effects*: may have negative effects on liver, brain, and nervous system, some may disrupt hormone system.

Products: mattresses, carpets, sofas and soft furniture, textiles (curtains, seat covers, etc) and clothing (some kids' pyjamas), electrical goods (computer housings, laptops, mobile phones, TVs, DVDs), irons, lighting.

Perfluorinated chemicals (PFOA, PFOSA, PFOS) Perfluorooctanoic acid, perfluorooctane sulfonamide, perfluorooctane sulfonate

Properties: resists breaking down (persistent); can build up in the blood and the liver (bioaccumulative), may be toxic.

Health effects*: may cause developmental defects, damage the immune system, interfere with thyroid hormone.

Products: non-stick cookware (PFOA used in manufacture), outdoor water repellent clothing, food containers, carpets, upholstery.

Bisphenol-A (BPA)

Properties: may disrupt hormone system, immune system.

Health effects*: may damage male reproductive system; may increase risks for some cancers; may lead to obesity, insulin resistance, polycystic ovarian disease, miscarriage.

Products: baby bottles, water bottles, linings of food and drink cans, dental fillings and sealants, electrical and electronic goods.

* as found in tests on animals, which is a standard way to determine which chemicals are harmful for humans and need to be strictly controlled or banned.

Trade Unions Priority List

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has compiled a Priority List of over **300** chemicals to draw attention to diseases suffered by workers exposed to chemicals in their jobs. These chemicals are considered to meet the REACH criteria for the most harmful chemicals. They should be replaced to protect the health of workers *and* consumers. This List has many chemicals in common with the SIN List.

www.etuc.org/r/830

Under the new European law, the most harmful chemicals, called 'substances of very high concern', are those that:

- cause cancer (carcinogens)
- change our DNA (mutagens)
- damage fertility or the foetus (toxic to reproduction)
- resist breaking down in the environment; can build up in the body, or may be toxic (persistent, bioaccumulative, toxic)
- are probably as bad as the above in other ways (equivalent concern).