



Press release

European Parliament Committee strengthens draft biocides law, but concerns remain

Brussels, 23 June 2010 - Health and environment groups welcome improvements to the European Commission's proposal for a revised EU biocides law, delivered in yesterday's vote of the European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI). (1)

"We are pleased to see that the Committee Members have emphasised the special vulnerability of children and pregnant women to the harmful effects of biocides. They recognised the need to ensure that biocides have no harmful effects on these vulnerable groups - something that was absent from the original Commission proposal," says Anne Stauffer, from the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

Evidence of harmful exposure to biocides, especially for the unborn child and small children, is steadily consolidating. One recent scientific review showed a positive association between childhood leukaemia and exposure to insecticides. (2)

Another step forward for the protection of public health is the requirement that the "combination effects" of exposure to biocides must be included in their risk assessment. "The move highlights growing concerns over the inadequacy of the single substance approach taken in current EU chemicals risk assessment," Ms Stauffer adds.

NGOs also welcome the outcome of the vote on nanomaterials, in particular the requirements on specific safety assessment methods, and consumer information through mandatory labelling.

"MEPs have shown once again that nanomaterials cannot be given a free ride until specific safety methods are developed," says Louise Duprez from the European Environmental Bureau (EEB).

Because of their novel properties, nano-biocides may pose new risks. For instance, nano silver can be more toxic than ordinary silver, which may have adverse impacts on the environment even at very low concentrations. The requirement of specific testing methods is essential for the protection of human health and the environment.

Christian Schweer, Pesticide Action Network Germany, welcomes the introduction of mandatory measures for the sustainable use of biocides. "Contrary to EU requirements for pesticides, there are no EU harmonised standards for the proper and sustainable use of biocides, although numerous incidents and malpractices have been already observed throughout Europe. ENVI MEPs have called on the Commission to come forward with a proposal for a Directive on the Sustainable Use. This is urgently needed and should include provisions for Integrated Pest Management plans, standards for qualification and certification of professional users and address biocide use in sensitive areas, such as in schools, kindergartens and at watersides."

Tackling the overuse of biocides will also help address growing fears that more frequent use of biocidal products may contribute to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The EU expert committee SCENHIR has recently warned about biocides overuse and its possible consequences for rising antibiotic resistance. (3)

Continuing concerns

NGOs were concerned before the vote that the ENVI committee would not go far enough to ensure that all hazardous products be removed from the market. (4) Despite the positive improvements of yesterday's vote, the health and environment NGOs will now take a careful look and make an overall assessment.

Concerns remain that too many hazardous biocides could be left on the market as a result of loopholes in the exclusion criteria. Questions also remain about the EU centralised authorisation system, as well as about data requirements for health toxicity and ecotoxicity. In addition, the time needed for an accurate product assessment and expert exchange seem in danger of being seriously impaired.

Health and environment NGOs urge MEPs to address these questions and loopholes in the upcoming plenary vote in September 2010.

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Notes to journalists

1. Revision of the current EU Biocides Directive 98/8/EC, which is available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1998:123:0001:0063:EN:PDF>

The EU Commission's proposal for the revision is available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0267:FIN:EN:PDF>

The ENVI report will form the basis for the European Parliament's plenary decision scheduled for September 2010. The draft report and the amendments from the Environment Committee can be found at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/organes/envi/envi_20100621

2. Residential pesticides exposure and child leukemia: A systematic review, Environmental Health Perspectives, <http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1289%2Fehp.0900966>

3. European Commission's Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks SCENHIR as recently warned about biocides overuse and its possible consequence for rising antibiotic resistance:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihir/docs/scenihir_o_021.pdf

4. PAN press release, 21 June 2010, <http://www.pan-europe.info/News/index.html>

The Health and Environment Alliance aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It achieves this by creating opportunities for better representation of citizens' and health experts' perspectives in the environment and health-related European policy-making. Our membership includes a diverse network of more than 60 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organisations across Europe and has a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is a network of over 600 participating non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals in over 90 countries working to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives. PAN Germany was established in 1984 as part of the global network and has been continually involved in initiatives to reduce pesticide use and to promote sustainable alternatives on national, European and global levels.

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) is a federation of over 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in most EU Member States, most candidate and potential candidate countries as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. EEB's aim is to protect and improve the environment by influencing EU policy, promoting sustainable development objectives and ensuring that Europe's citizens can play a part in achieving these goals. EEB stands for environmental justice and participatory democracy.