



Information Release

## Study charts path for better protection from harmful "chemical mixtures"

**Brussels, 11 February 2010** - The EU can and should assess and manage the risks from exposure to chemical mixtures, better known as the "cocktail effect", according to a significant report commissioned by the Environment Directorate General (DG) of the European Commission and released on 9 February 2010. (1)

The study, entitled "State of the Art Report on Mixtures Toxicity", says scientific research "underlines the need for dedicated regulatory considerations of the problem of chemical mixtures in the environment". Although commissioned by DG Environment, it does not reflect any official view of the EU Commission. However, the report makes an important contribution to the debate about how EU policy should tackle ongoing multiple exposures to harmful chemicals.

DG Environment is inviting comment and questions on the report by 30 April 2010. This will be followed by a consultation process with EU Member State ministries and EU scientific committees. The Commission's intention is to issue a collective, official position on the way forward in assessing and managing the risks from combination effects by early 2012. (2)

The Health and Environment Alliance strongly welcomes this report. "We have been highlighting the link between a combination of effects from synthetic hormone disruptors and breast cancer for several years," (3) says Lisette van Vliet, Toxics Policy Adviser. "We urge groups to give input so that the Commission, in developing their official position, are informed by the expertise and concerns of the health and environment communities."

The report takes a critical look at the current science on "mixtures"; considers how EU legislation currently deals with hazards and risks from such toxic mixtures; surveys different approaches and lessons from EU Member States; and reviews how other governments and international bodies, such as the WHO International Programme on Chemical Safety, deal with the mixtures problem.

Under current EU regulations, the assessment of health and environmental risks posed by chemicals is usually based on the evaluation of single chemicals and assumes the absence of any other interacting chemicals. The report makes clear that this approach is not adequate.

"Scientific research has repeatedly demonstrated that the effects of mixtures are considerably more pronounced than the effect of each of its individual components and that environmental pollution is from the chemical mixtures and not from individual substances," the report says. It notes that there is sufficient scientific know-how to assess the risks emerging from this exposure.

Most notably, the study points to the necessity of establishing consistent and clear legal mandates to incorporate mixtures assessments into the many EU laws so that human health and environmental risks are not underestimated. "We call on the European Commission to take the recommendations of this report into full account within the EU Strategy on Endocrine Disruptors as swiftly as possible," says Lisette van Vliet.

The impact from mixtures of chemicals to which humans, wildlife and the environment are daily exposed was the subject of conclusions issued from the European Council of Environment Ministers in December 2009. The Ministers expressed serious concern, and set the Commission to assess existing legislation and suggest modifications. (4) (5)

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## Notes for journalists

1. The report, State of the Art report on Mixtures Toxicity, is posted at: <u>http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/effects.htm</u> The pdf link for the full study:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/pdf/report\_Mixture%20toxicity.pdf

The study was led by a foremost research scientist in endocrine disruption, Professor Andreas Kortenkamp, Head of the Centre for Toxicology in University of London's School of Pharmacy.

2. Any organisations or individuals with interest and relevant experience who would like to comment or ask questions on the report, are welcome to write to <u>ENV-Chemical-Mixtures@ec.europa.eu</u> by 30 April 2010 at the latest.

3. The report on breast cancer, including the cocktail effect of oestrogen mimicking chemicals, was produced by HEAL through its Chemicals Health Monitor Project and CHEM Trust, a UK charity whose aim is to protect humans and wildlife from harmful chemicals. The report "Factors influencing the risk of breast cancer – established and emerging" is available at:

http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?rubrique100

It was developed from an appraisal of the scientific evidence of breast cancer and exposure to hormonally active chemicals produced by Professor Kortenkamp, who is also the lead author of the report for DG Environment.

Other recent studies show that chemicals with hormone disrupting properties are suspected of playing a role in birth defects, the increasing rates of testicular cancer and the decline in sperm counts - with one in five young men in several EU countries now estimated to have impaired fertility. Examples of such chemicals include some phthalates, which are used as softeners in PVC plastic products such as flooring and shoes, and Bisphenol-A (BPA), which is widely used to make hard clear plastic such as babies bottles, tin can linings and DVDs.

4. The Environment Ministers in the December Council gave the European Commission the task of recommending how exposure to multiple hormone disrupting chemicals should be further addressed within existing EU laws, as part of the forthcoming report on the implementation of the Community strategy on endocrine disrupters due by the end of 2010. The Environment Council also asked the Commission to assess whether EU laws adequately address risks from exposure to multiple chemicals (not solely endocrine disruptors) from different sources and pathways, and to report on any necessary changes by early 2012.

5. NGO reaction to the outcome of the Ministerial meeting see: http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Final\_NGO\_response\_Council\_conclusions.pdf

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Chemical Health Monitor is an initiative of the Health and Environment Alliance. The project's website is available at www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org