



28 September 2004

European NGOs launch campaign for safer chemicals

European Public Health Alliance director Tamsin Rose addressed a packed meeting in the European Parliament on Tuesday, 28 September 2004 to emphasise that REACH, the EU's proposed chemical legislation, was not primarily to do with chemicals and science but "about the health of our citizens and the environment in which we live."

Speaking on behalf of a broad-based platform of health and environment NGOs, Ms Rose told MEPs that REACH was the most important dossier they would deal with during their five years in the Parliament. "Ninety-three per cent of European citizens think chemical safety is important for their health," she said.

Safety data is currently available on only 14% of chemicals produced at levels of more than 1,000 tonnes per annum. The 30,000 chemicals that were already on the market in 1981, when safety regulation was introduced, still have no safety data. (1) "During 20 years of continued exposure, we have been living as guinea pigs without any awareness of how little is known on the safety of chemicals in regular use," Ms Rose said. "Legislation on REACH should phase out the use of hazardous chemicals, only allowing their continued use if no safer alternatives are available and their use is essential to society," she said.

French cancer professor Dominique Belpomme told the meeting of concern within the medical community. "Many scientists now believe that the environment, and more specifically the chemical pollution of the physical environment, has a major role in explaining the origins of cancer and numerous other diseases, such as some malformations of the reproductive system, certain diseases of the nervous system, allergies and asthma in children."

Professor Belpomme said that in France, the incidence of breast cancer had doubled, and prostate cancers had tripled, during the past twenty years. Children are also affected. Quoting an IARC study (2), he said that over the past 20-30 years, the number of paediatric cancers has increased by 1% per year. A hundred international scientists,

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including several Nobel Prize winners, and 200 NGOs have signed Prof. Belpomme's call for a withdrawal of products containing harmful chemicals, known as The Paris Appeal (3).

Italian MEP Guido Sacconi, who hosted the meeting, said that certain "pressures" had led to delays in the legislation. As EU parliamentary Rapporteur on REACH for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, he supported the efforts of the platform of health and environment NGOs.

The following day, platform representatives including members of EEN, EPHA, Women in Europe for a Common Future, WWF, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and European Environment Bureau were visiting MEPs from their own countries. All carry the unified message on the phasing out of harmful chemicals and the need for stronger registration and more transparent information on the chemical composition of goods that European consumers buy and use every day.

EPHA Environment Network (EEN) is a new international NGO that brings together networks and groups advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well being. (4)

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Please find enclosed the papers by Professor Dominique Belpomme and Tamsin Rose

Notes to editors:

1. Before regulation was introduced in 1981, industry was not required to provide data on chemicals. When the regulation was introduced, it applied only to new chemicals coming onto the market. There is still no safety data on the vast majority of the chemicals already on the market in 1981. Since the requirement was introduced, the rate of new chemicals arriving on the market date has slowed considerably.
2. IARC: [International Agency for Research on Cancer](http://www.iarc.fr)
3. The Paris Appeal can be viewed at www.artac.info
4. For more information on EPHA Environment Network, www.env-health.org

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