

## NGOs call on MEPs to put health and environment concerns at the heart of European chemicals reform - REACH

### Protecting our citizen's health and the environment with REACH

Environmental, health and women's NGOs call on Members of the European Parliament to ensure that health and environment protection measures are at the heart of the reform of Europe's chemical policy – REACH.

In line with 93% of Europeans we believe that chemicals safety matters for health and the environment. Chemicals have brought enormous benefits to society but research also increasingly links many of them to cancers, allergies and fertility problems. The current legislation has failed to regulate thousands of chemicals, which are on the market without even the most basic safety data publicly available. This includes many chemicals with proven dangerous effects for people and wildlife.

### REACH – EU proposal on Chemicals

After a five-year consultation process, in October 2003 the European Commission published its legislative proposal – REACH – for a new chemicals regulatory framework. (COM(2003)644). We believe that REACH has the right framework to help industry move towards responsible production and sustainable development, through reducing the negative impacts of chemicals, fostering innovation and increasing public confidence in the chemical sector.

However, the European Commission has severely weakened its legislative proposal in response to heavy pressure from the chemicals industry. Unless REACH is strengthened substantially in key areas, it will not realise its benefits for environment and health protection.

In the forthcoming European Parliament debate and vote on REACH, **environmental, health and women's NGOs call on MEPs to improve REACH in five priority areas, in order to:**

1. **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
2. **Strengthen registration procedures** to close the existing gap in safety information for chemicals produced in 1-10 tonne per annum quantities.
3. Ensure that industry information receives an **independent quality audit**
4. Require chemicals used in **imported articles** to undergo the **same information requirements** as those in EU-made articles, so as to protect consumers and avoid distortion of competition
5. Make sufficient **information** on chemicals **publicly available** so that downstream users, retailers and consumers can find out which chemicals are contained in the products they purchase and make their own risk judgements.

**Current loopholes and deficiencies in the proposed REACH legislation would allow, for instance:**

- § continued use of **Deca**, a flame retardant chemical used in furniture and electronics, which we believe should be identified and phased out through the REACH authorisation process. Deca contaminates globally, as far away as the habitats and bodies of polar bears, right into the heart of urban society, including the bodies of MEPs. Yet it remains in routine use, even though some companies (e.g. IKEA) are using alternatives
- § continued use of **polycarbonate baby bottles**. These are made from Bisphenol A, which can leach out of the bottle into the milk. Bisphenol A is a known hormone disrupter, which has been shown to have effects at very low doses, and so could harm the growth and development of children. In spite of this, at least 140,000 tonnes of Bisphenol A are on sale every year in Europe, for a range of uses including in the lining food tins;
- § the continued use of chemicals in everyday consumer products, such as **children's toys**, carpets and many other household goods, which **accumulate in human bodies and are traceable in blood and breast milk**. There is scientific evidence to suggest that some of these chemicals may have impacts on fertility, cancer and intellectual development.



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# NGOs' five key demands to improve REACH

- 1. An authorisation for the use of 'chemicals of very high concern' should not be given unless no safer alternatives are available and the use is essential to society. We believe the substitution principle must be mandatory in this process.**

Only when the loophole of 'adequate control' has been deleted will REACH give a clear signal on which chemicals need to be used less or removed from use. Otherwise, perfectly acceptable, safer alternatives will be sidelined and withheld from chemical users, and consumers will continue to be exposed to unacceptable risks.

- 2. Registration procedures must close the existing gap in safety information.**

In the proposed new regulation, 20,000 chemicals have been excluded from a proper safety assessment. The three (non-animal) tests removed from the registration requirements for 1-10 tonne per annum chemicals must be reinstated in order to provide sufficient information to evaluate the hazard posed by them. Without sufficient information, including biodegradability tests and exposure information, chemicals cannot be classified according to their danger or prioritised for further action.

- 3. Industry information needs independent quality control.**

REACH provides industry with a unique opportunity to take responsibility for chemicals safety. This will only work if sufficient quality auditing and regulatory quality control is supplied to guarantee the reliability of the information provided. All registration dossiers should be quality audited by an independent third or certified party, without a conflict of interest, and at least 5% of all registration dossiers must be evaluated by the national authorities.

- 4. Chemicals used in imported articles must pass the same information requirements as those in EU-made articles.**

The current proposal's weak requirements could allow companies from outside the EU to import articles containing chemicals not registered under REACH, which will not properly protect consumers from unsafe chemicals in imported products. This may also create competitive pressure on certain sectors of EU manufacturing industry. Europe is the world's biggest market and it should provide leadership in setting new global safety standards.

- 5. Sufficient information must be publicly available.**

Sufficient public information on chemicals will allow third parties to make their own risk judgements about the chemicals they use. Chemical users need to be able to choose between alternatives, and consumers need to know about dangerous chemicals in products. The list of non-confidential information in REACH therefore needs to be extended to include the names of registrants, volume categories and exposure information. Information must be handed down the manufacturing chain to enable retailers and consumers to know if dangerous chemicals are present in finished articles. The procedure for obtaining information from the chemical agency is currently time-consuming and inefficient – it needs to be streamlined and improved.

## ***For further information, contact:***

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