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Scientists deliver wake-up call: “Reduce chemical exposure to reduce breast cancer”

Brussels 2 April 2008 – Around 1 in 10 women in Europe will develop breast cancer. Bringing down this figure cannot be achieved without reducing exposure to certain chemicals, according to a report launched in the European Parliament today. (1) (2)

Entitled “Breast cancer and exposure to hormonally active chemicals”, the report was written by Professor Andreas Kortenkamp, head of the Centre for Toxicology, School of Pharmacy, University of London.

Prof. Kortenkamp coordinated a major cluster of international research projects on endocrine (hormone) disrupting chemicals between 2002 and 2007. These projects received more than 20 million Euros in EU funding. (3)

“Good laboratory and epidemiological evidence exists suggesting that man-made chemicals which mimic oestrogen contribute to breast cancer,” says Professor Kortenkamp.

“We will not be able to reduce the risk of breast cancer without addressing preventable causes, particularly exposure to chemicals.”

Since 2005, 200 international scientists, including Professor Kortenkamp, have signed the Prague Declaration, which expresses scientific concerns related to the risks posed to health by chemicals in everyday use, particularly those that interfere with the human hormone system. (4)

The new report represents an appraisal of existing research and calls for action to reduce people’s exposures to the chemicals that disrupt hormones and mimic oestrogen. The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and CHEM Trust commissioned the research review as part of the Chemicals Health Monitor project (5) at a time when breast cancer is reaching epidemic proportions.

Over the past 20 years, breast cancer has increased dramatically throughout Europe, with incidence in some countries increasing by more than 50% or even doubling in the last 20 years. (6)

Elizabeth Salter Green Director of CHEM Trust says: “There is a misconception that breast cancer is an inherited disease and therefore inevitable. This is a quite simply a myth, most cases of breast cancer are acquired over a women’s lifetime, and so most are preventable.” (7)

European Parliamentarians could play a pivotal role in reducing breast cancer. “They need to wake up to what needs to be done,” Ms Salter Green says. “Unfortunately, good science and its expert interpretation by scores of scientists throughout the EU have not yet been taken up and turned into effective policy action.”

Génon Jensen, HEAL Executive Director urges MEPs not to miss the current policy opportunities that exist. They include specific action in three legislative areas: first, the EU chemical safety regulation, known as REACH; second, pesticide reform; and third, the directive on cosmetics that is currently under review. Ms Jensen says: “Several man-made chemicals should be removed from the market and replaced with less harmful substitutes.”

“Such action could reduce the suffering of millions of women, and finally deliver the reduction in exposure that dozens of eminent EU scientists working at the cutting edge of research called for in the Prague Declaration nearly three years ago,” Ms Jensen concludes.

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Notes for journalists

1. The report is entitled "Breast cancer and exposure to hormonally active chemicals: An appraisal of the scientific evidence". It is a background briefing paper by Professor Andreas Kortenkamp, Head of Centre for Toxicology, School of Pharmacy, University of London, UK, April 2008, 16 pages. It is available from 01.01 hours (CET) on Wednesday, 2 April 2008 at www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org
2. Invitation and launch announcement - The presentations, debate and lunch take place in the Members' Restaurant (private salon), European Parliament, 12.30-14.30. It is hosted by MEP Avril Doyle. Details of the meeting at: www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org Avril Doyle is a member of MEPS Against Cancer, which has a membership of over 60 MEPS representing most EU countries: <http://www.mepsagainstcancer.org>
3. More information about report author, Professor Andreas Kortenkamp is available at http://www.pharmacy.ac.uk/andreas_kortenkamp.html
4. The Prague Declaration is available at <http://www.ehponline.org/docs/2007/10517/suppl.pdf>
5. Chemicals Health Monitor project website at <http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/>
6. As shown in the latest available data up to 2005 in World Health Organisation (WHO)/ Europe (2007), European health for all database (HFA-DB), World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe. Data-base online at <http://data.euro.who.int/hfad/>
Breast cancer incidence graph can be accessed online at www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org
7. The widely held view that breast cancer is exclusively a genetic disease is inaccurate. Eight out of 9 women who develop breast cancer do not have an affected mother, sister, or daughter, according to the report "Factors affecting the risks of breast cancer" available on meeting report page at www.chemicalsmonitor.org.

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection and sustainability improves health and to empower the health community to contribute their expertise to policy making. Since its inception, HEAL's membership has grown to include a diverse network of more than 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe which together have a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process. Website: www.env-health.org

CHEM Trust is a UK charity whose aim is to protect humans and wildlife from harmful chemicals particularly hormone disruptors, the cocktail effect of chemicals and the role of chemical exposures in early life.

CHEM Trust is working towards a goal where chemicals play no part in causing impaired reproduction, deformities, disease or deficits in neurological function. CHEM Trust is committed to engaging with medical, scientific and patient communities to raise the level of dialogue on the role of chemicals in chronic disease, and the wider implications this may have for disease prevention strategies. Website:

<http://www.chemtrust.org.uk/>

Chemicals Health Monitor Project (CHM) was launched by HEAL, CHEM Trust, Collaborative on Health and Environment and others in March 2007. It 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. Key documents about the campaign and information about the project can be found at:

<http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org>

The Project Co-ordinator is **Hana Kuncova** e-mail: hana@env-health.org