

## Speech from Tamsin Rose, European Public Health Alliance on behalf of the NGO platform

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the the chemicals cocktail organised by a broad alliance of environment, health and women's organisations. We are delighted to have an expert speaker, Mr Belpomme who is a professor of medical oncology and chairman of the French Association for therapeutic cancer research and he will highlight the viewpoint of the scientific community.

Let me explain why the NGOs have joined forces to organise tonight's event.

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

What is REACH about? Chemicals and science? - No, it is about the health of our citizens and the environment we live in. Although our daily lives have been transformed by chemicals bringing benefits in many ways, there is increasing research showing links between some products and allergies, cancers, and fertility problems. We can't afford to let the health gains and improvements in quality of life made in the last century be undermined by chemical contamination with unforeseeable results.

This is the most important dossier you will deal with during your 5 years in the Parliament. Why? Because 93 % of citizens think that chemical safety is important for their health and environment.

In 1981 it was decided that industry should continue to be allowed to sell all the chemicals they were producing at that point, without any obligation to produce safety data. All new chemicals had to provide detailed health and safety data, and since that date the rate of new chemicals coming onto the market has slowed considerably.

Despite more than 20 years of continued exposure, when as European citizens we have been living as guinea pigs without our knowledge or our consent, we still have very little knowledge about the safety of the vast majority of chemicals in regular use – with around 30,000 chemicals in use at more than 1 tonnes per year since before 1981. **In fact, only 14 % of high volume chemicals (>1 000 tonnes per annum) have a basic set of data publicly available. 21 % have no safety data at all and only 30 % of the chemicals have simple information about whether they accumulate in our bodies.** This experience has taught us that industry is not willing to generate safety data on the chemicals it uses. What we need is a strongly enforced legal requirement for information on the long term impact of chemicals on our bodies and our environment.

**This brings us to REACH itself.** After 5 years of painful consultation and compromise, we have a legislative proposal on the table. We think that REACH is the right framework for creating incentives for responsible production and innovation by the industry. It could also build public confidence in the chemical sector. But the proposal itself has been severely weakened in key areas following heavy lobbying by the industry. As it stands it will not provide the safety guarantee that citizens demand nor will it ensure that the chemicals sector is a sustainable part of our European economy. A weak REACH is a lose-lose situation.

So what do this coalition think should be done to make REACH a real landmark piece of

legislation?

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**. We have to be able to trust the data and have confidence in our industrial sectors.
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.

Ladies and gentlemen, this event is just the start of the process. Over the coming 18 months we intend to develop a close collaboration with MEPs, and will be making specific appointments to share information, data, expertise and examples of bio-monitoring and studies that we have prepared on the economic and social aspects of REACH. We are looking for a win-win situation, that allows MEPs at the end of their 5 years in Parliament to return to your constituencies and communities and be able to tell voters that a strong and effective REACH is what you have delivered to protect their health and environment.

Thank you for coming and participating in the evening. You are invited to stay, network and meet the NGO activists who have come from across Europe.