

Political priorities of President Ursula von der Leyen and
Mission letter Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner-designate for Environment
and Oceans

HEAL questions for European Parliament hearings

Legislature 2019-2024

Your [mission letter](#) mentions:

- Cross-cutting priorities
 - Reducing emissions
 - Improving the health of Europe's citizen
- Lead on
 - Delivering on the Von der Leyen's Commission zero-pollution ambition which requires a wide-ranging approach looking at air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, emissions, pesticides and endocrine disrupters
 - The Von der Leyen's Commission work on a new circular economy action plan to ensure sustainable resource use, notably in resource-intensive and high-impact sectors, which should support and feed into the new industrial strategy
 - Address the issue of microplastics and ensure existing legislation on plastics is implemented

QUESTIONS

In order to deliver on reducing emissions and improving the health of Europe's citizens:

Reducing pollution

A healthy planet for healthy people

Harmful chemicals are now ubiquitous in the environment but preventing environmental pollution can save lives and reduce the toll of diseases. European governments have committed to an 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP). One of the priority objectives of the current 7th EAP expiring in 2020 is to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being.

Question 1 - The EU's Environmental Action Programmes have been essential to define and guide the environmental strategies and measures. In the 8th EAP, what will be your main policy proposals to ensure that a zero-pollution strategy really reduces the toll of diseases?

Air quality:

Clean up the air we breathe

Air pollution is the number one environmental threat to health in Europe, leading to 400,000 early deaths each year. It exacerbates chronic illnesses and causes huge health, environmental and economic costs. In a resolution in spring 2019, the European Parliament [called for action for clean air](#) in Europe.

Question 1 - In order to clean up the air we breathe outside, what immediate actions - including in the European Green Deal - do you foresee to cut emissions at source and ensure that existing EU air quality standards are respected in all Member States?

Question 2 - The World Health Organization has set the gold standard for air quality, based on a thorough review of the evidence by hundreds of experts. For key air pollutants, the EU's standards are less strict than what is needed to protect health. Do you commit to working to align EU legislation with the latest World Health Organisation guidelines, expected in 2020/2021?

Question 3 - Indoor air quality and indoor environments have received far less political attention than outdoor air, even though people spend the majority of their time indoors. Which measures will you propose to clean up indoor air? How will you tackle the worrying fact that pollution from outside travels inside into schools and other buildings where vulnerable groups of the population spend their time?

Question 4 - What will you do to tackle air pollution in EU neighbouring states, especially the Western Balkans, which travels to Europe and harms people's health?

More resources: HEAL infographic on clean air for health (available in [EN](#), [DE](#)); HEAL [briefing on healthy buildings](#); HEAL Citizen science investigation [Healthy Air, Healthier Children](#) highlighting the indoor air quality dimension in air quality and climate efforts ([FR](#), [DE](#), [BG](#), [SP](#)); HEAL report on [Chronic Coal Pollution](#) and opportunities for EU action on the Western Balkans to improve health and economies across Europe

Healthy mobility

Fossil fuelled cars, buses and trucks are noisy, pollute the air and threaten our health.

Question 1 - How will your action contribute to healthy mobility in the EU?

More resources: HEAL [project on healthy transport in Germany](#)

Endocrine disrupting chemicals:

EDC-Free future

Everyday exposure to low-doses of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) is linked to numerous health disorders, including hormonal cancers, obesity, diabetes, infertility or learning disabilities. Conservative estimates of the burden of diseases linked to EDCs in Europe amount to at least 163 billion euros every year. Yet existing European regulations on endocrine disruptors are not living up to this health emergency: identification criteria only exist for known and presumed EDCs under the biocides and pesticides legislations, the REACH system for identification of EDCs is very slow, does not address groups of similar substances (e.g. only bisphenol A in the bisphenol group), and EDC identification under REACH does not result in automatic bans under other legislations (e.g. bisphenol A is identified as an EDC under REACH but is tolerated in food contact materials). In June of this year, Member States asked the Commission to swiftly present an updated EDC strategy and fix regulatory gaps, which is still awaited and needs to address all the issues mentioned above.

Question 1 - As part of the new European strategy on EDCs promised by the Commission, which measures will you take to achieve the goal to minimise Europeans' exposure to hormone disruptors?

Question 2 - In particular what are your proposals to address all suspected, presumed and known endocrine disruptors we are exposed to every day and to speed up their regulation across sectors and consumer products?

More resources: EDC Free website (available in [EN](#) – [DE](#) – [NL](#) – [SE](#) – [DK](#) – [ES](#) – [FR](#)); HEAL [infographic on why low dose exposure matters](#) (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [PT](#), [ES](#), [NL](#))

Hazardous chemicals:

Zero pollution, zero victims from pollution

President-elect von der Leyen committed to a cross-cutting zero-pollution strategy that will: “protect citizens' health from environmental degradation and pollution, address air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides and endocrine disruptors”. Health groups think that the primary focus of the zero-pollution strategy should be on pollution prevention and the emphasis of the precautionary and polluter-pays principles.

Question 1 - How will you contribute to the development and implementation of this strategy, and what kind of actions will you include to protect especially those most vulnerable to the impact of pollution, such as pregnant women, children, those already sick, or the poor? How will you address the delay between exposure to pollution and the onset of disease and ill-health, which can happen decades after the exposure? What do you propose to address the problem of accumulation of pollution and persistency of substances?

Question 2 - What do you propose for ending environmentally harmful subsidies and ensuring compensations for patients that are victims of exposure to hazardous substances, either in the zero-pollution strategy or in other policy-measures?

More resources: HEAL briefing on a non-toxic strategy ([EN](#), [FR](#), [NL](#)); HEAL Fossil Fuel Subsidies & Health report ([EN](#), [DE](#), [PL](#))

Pesticides:

Stop pesticides to promote health

Pesticides in our food, water and air can harm children's healthy development, disrupt our hormonal systems, and increase the risk of cancer and infertility. As part of a recent European Citizens' Initiative, 1.3 million Europeans asked for mandatory pesticide reduction targets for the EU and its Member States. In July this year, the European Food Safety Authority recommended the non-renewal of chlorpyrifos-ethyl and -methyl, a brain harming pesticide found in EU fruits. We welcome the Commission's announcement of its intention to support a non-renewal of those two active substances.

Question 1 - In order to keep poisonous pesticides out of our food and to protect our health, which immediate measures will you take in order to improve the implementation of the Plant Protection Products Regulation, at both levels of evaluation and approval to guarantee that the health and environment protection stated objectives are effectively achieved?

More resources: HEAL chlorpyrifos fact sheet (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [ES](#)). Petition to ban chlorpyrifos (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#))

Circular economy:

A safe and toxic-free circular economy

European rules for dealing with toxic substances in virgin and recycled materials are currently not harmonised. Not only are too many toxic chemicals making their way into everyday consumer products (including [food packaging](#), [carpets](#), [toys](#), [cosmetics](#)...), but the European push for increased recycling content in products can also put health at risk. Examples include new toys made with recycled plastics containing toxic [brominated dioxins](#) and [flame retardants](#) such as PBDEs and HBCDs at levels that would not be allowed under rules for virgin materials, or carpets containing phthalates such as [DEHP](#) that is banned in the EU since 2015 but is still allowed in recycled PVC.

Question 1 - As part of the zero-pollution objective announced by President von der Leyen, which measures do you commit to implement in order to guarantee that all consumer products are free of toxic chemicals and fully safe for use by the end of the Commission mandate and that recycling does not take place at the expense of health protection and that the transition towards a circular economy prevents their endless recirculation?

Question 2 - In particular, how do you plan to address the presence of identified substances of very high concerns (SVHCs) as well as known and suspected endocrine disruptors in products?

More resources: Toxic Loophole – how hazardous waste is recycled into new products (available in [EN](#), [NL](#), [FR](#), [DE](#)); Briefing: Detoxing Carpets (available in [EN](#), [NL](#), [FR](#), [DE](#)); Briefing: Toxic chemicals found in carpets sold by major European manufacturers (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#), [NL](#)); Infographic: the

European Carpet Market (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [NL](#), [DE](#)); Infographic: What are the health impacts of toxic chemicals possibly present in carpets? (available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [NL](#), [DE](#)); [Infographic: Toxic chemicals detected in carpets and their potential health impacts](#); [Video: Toxic chemicals found in carpets sold by major European manufacturers](#)

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 70 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.