



5-MINUTE TASK FOR YOUR HEALTH: Help push harmful chemicals off the market!

Brussels, 13 March 2009 – Recent European Union legislation gives the consumer the right to know whether certain toxic chemicals are being used in everyday products.

To celebrate European Consumer Day on Friday, 13 March 2009*, a public interest coalition is promoting an information leaflet for consumers about new rights under REACH, the recent EU chemicals legislation. (1) The groups involved are concerned about how certain chemicals used in consumer products are affecting human health.

The "know your rights" leaflet is the initiative of the Chemicals Health Monitor project (2) of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and supported by 14 European and national health, environmental, women' and consumers' groups. (3)

Entitled "Harmful chemicals in the products you buy? Your right to know", the leaflet explains how the new 'right to know' works, and how consumers can use it. It includes a sample letter to a manufacturer or retailer to obtain information on whether harmful chemicals are present in the product. It should take consumers not more than five minutes to prepare. The leaflet also gives examples of chemicals of high concern that are typically found in different consumer products. (2)

Why this action? Certain chemicals currently used in the production of consumer products are likely contributors to some chronic health conditions. The REACH legislation introduced an authorisation mechanism that can strictly control the uses of harmful chemicals. However, the process is moving slowly leaving the door open for industry to continue using chemicals in consumer products that are recognised as being harmful to health. (4)

"The evidence that some chemicals on the market can contribute to chronic conditions, such as allergies, some types of cancer, and reproductive problems, is growing daily," says Dr Lisette Van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor, HEAL. "New rights created by the REACH law mean that when consumers ask, companies must inform them, free of charge, which harmful chemicals are in the product. By asking for this information, consumers show they want manufacturers and retailers to use safer alternatives."

* Although activities celebrating Consumer Day in Europe are taking place this year on Friday, 13 March, the official date of European Consumer Day is 15 March.

Notes

1. REACH – Registration, Evaluation, and Authorisation of Chemicals
<http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?rubrique75>
The "right to know" component of the legislation requires the manufacturer or retailer of a consumer product to provide a response to written questions in relation to chemicals on the official list of "Substances of Very High Concern", otherwise known as the "Candidate list", within a 45-day period. More information: <http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?article262>



2. Chemicals Health Monitor project is at www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org. The consumer leaflet is available at the Chemicals Health Monitor website:
<http://www.chemicalshealthmonitor.org/spip.php?rubrique111>
Examples of chemicals of high concern singled out in the leaflet's "Hidden Dangers" box include phthalates, brominated flame retardants, perfluorinated chemicals, and Bisphenol A. Information on the properties of these chemicals, their health effects and the products in which they can be found is also given.
3. Campaign partner organisations: Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), Greenpeace; the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC); European Environmental Bureau; WECF – Women in Europe for a Common Future (Germany, France, Netherlands), the European Consumer Association in Standardisation (ANEC); BUND/Friends of the Earth, Germany; Verein zur Hilfe Umweltbedingt Erkrankter (Association for the Support of Environmentally Sick People) Germany, Arnika Association, Czech Republic; Consumers Protection Association, Czech Republic; Cancer Prevention & Education Society, UK; Irish Doctors Environmental Association; CAAG – Clean Air Action Group, Hungary; My Right to Know, Bulgaria; CIEL – Center for International Environmental Law, USA/Switzerland
4. The current version of the official list of chemicals that are candidates for the authorisation process numbers only 15, in contrast to two lists of chemicals made by civil society organisations and trade unions which together cover 482 chemicals. The lists were compiled by ChemSec and the European Trade Union Confederation and are based on criteria defined in the REACH legislation. The SIN (Substitute It Now) List 1.0 (267 chemicals) produced by the International Chemical Secretariat (ChemSec) is available at <http://www.sinlist.org>. The list of 303 chemicals to which workers are exposed and responsible for occupational diseases compiled by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) will be available at <http://www.etuc.org/r/830>

Contacts:

Dr Lisette Van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor, Health and Environment Alliance, 28 Boulevard Charlemagne, B-1000 Brussels. Tel. +32 2 234 3645. Mobile: +32 2 484 614 528. Email: lisette@env-health.org

Genon K. Jensen, Executive Director, Health & Environment Alliance. Tel: +32 2 234 3641 (direct) Fax: +32 2 234 3649 E-mail: genon@env-health.org Mobile: +32 472 445968 Website: www.env-health.org

Diana Smith, Communications, Health and Environment Alliance, Tel: +33 1 55 25 25 84, Mobile: +33 6 33 04 2943 E-mail: Diana@gsmith.com.fr Website: www.env-health.org

The Health and Environment Alliance aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It achieves this by creating opportunities for better representation of citizens' and health experts' perspectives in the environment and health-related European policy-making. Our membership includes a diverse network of more than 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organisations across Europe and has a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in both EU debates and the decision-making process.