



GREENPEACE



Ministers worried about hazardous chemicals cocktails, but postpone action

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Brussels – EU Environment ministers meeting in Brussels today have expressed concerns that the environment and the health of European citizens may not be properly protected from the combined effects of hazardous chemicals, particularly those that can disrupt hormones. However, they have decided to postpone any decisions on tackling this problem by reducing the combined exposure to such chemicals.

Environment, health, women's and consumer organizations welcome the ministers' recognition of the risks of the so-called 'cocktail effects', but warn that what is really needed are urgent measures to reduce exposure to hazardous chemicals from various sources and their substitution with safer alternatives.

Recent studies show that chemicals with hormone disrupting properties are suspected of playing a role in birth defects, the increasing rates of testicular cancer and the decline in sperm counts - with 1 in 5 young men in several EU countries now estimated to have impaired fertility.¹ Additional research shows mounting concerns that exposure to hormone disrupting chemicals may also be linked to increase in breast cancer². Examples of such chemicals include some phthalates, softeners used in PVC plastic products such as flooring and shoes, and bisphenol-A, widely used to make hard clear plastic such as babies bottles, tin can linings and DVDs.

In spite of their worries, EU ministers have merely invited the European Commission to provide a report analyzing the gaps in existing EU legislation and proposing appropriate modifications. The deadline for this European Commission report was postponed until 2012, meaning it will be years before much-needed amendments to legislation will be discussed.

NGOs are urging the European Commission to prepare concrete amendments to deal with the combination effects of chemicals in existing EU legislation, in particular REACH³, in order to protect the health of Europe's citizens and environment. They also call on companies and EU Member States to enhance the substitution with safer alternatives and adopt reduction measures to reduce exposures to hormone disrupting chemicals.

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Notes to editors

1. See CHEM Trust report, written by Prof R. Sharpe, on male reproductive health disorders and the potential role of exposure to environmental chemicals (including hormone disrupting chemicals), 2009
<http://www.chemtrust.org.uk/documents/ProfRSHARPE-MaleReproductiveHealth-CHEMTrust09.pdf>
2. See CHEM Trust and HEAL report, written by Prof A. Kortenkamp, on breast cancer and exposure to hormonally active chemicals, 2008
<http://www.chemtrust.org.uk/documents/BCexposuretochemicals.pdf>
3. REACH is the acronym of the EU chemicals law and stands for Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of chemicals
4. A recent Danish survey has raised concerns that 2-year-old children may be at risk from daily combined exposure to certain chemicals, particularly chemicals with hormone disrupting properties commonly found in food and the indoor environment, and used in some personal care products.
See report: <http://www.mst.dk/Udgivelser/Publications/2009/978-87-92548-81-8.htm>