



MEDIA ADVISORY

New European Chemicals Agency must act on hazardous chemicals

WHEN: The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) will open on 3rd of June 2008 in Helsinki.

WHAT: The task of the European Chemicals Agency is to assure the implementation of REACH, the EU chemicals regulation that entered into force on 1st June 2007 after 8 years of fierce debate.

WHAT IS AT STAKE: The opening of ECHA marks the beginning of the obligation for companies to provide health and safety information on industrial chemicals. However REACH registration only applies to around 30,000 of the more than 100,000 known chemicals - i.e. only those substances produced in amounts of more than one tonne per year. In the following months ECHA will prepare a 'candidate list' for substances of very high concern that will be subject to legal actions such as bans. This list will consist of substances with dangerous properties including those that are proven to cause cancer, impair fertility or bioaccumulate. Industry will be obliged to apply for permission for their use and consumers will have the right to obtain more information on the eventual presence of these substances in the products they buy. Proposals for the first version of the 'candidate' list are expected to be published in early autumn 2008.

WHAT PUBLIC INTEREST ORGANISATIONS ASK: A coalition of European environmental, health, women's and consumer groups is calling for the new European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) to give absolute priority to the protection of public health and the environment. While in principle hundreds of chemicals meet the classifications for "substances of very high concern", only a few dozen may be included in the list in the immediate future. The European Commission and ECHA appear to have passed all responsibility for proposing dangerous substances onto EU Member States.

The public interest organisations demand ECHA

- ✓ to invest more resources in the creation of a comprehensive list that includes – from the outset - all known hazardous substances. The presence of worrisome chemicals in humans and the environment requires protective measures without delay. An extensive list of candidate substances scheduled for tightened rules in the future would also serve industry as a warning signal to look for and adopt safer alternatives.
- ✓ to ensure a fair balance of public or private interests representation in its technical committees as well as full transparency and access to documents on its procedures and decisions.

The coalition will closely monitor the work of ECHA demanding transparency and access to information, in the belief that public participation is essential to ensure that REACH becomes an effective tool to protect the environment and public health for generations to come.

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Note to editors:

The brochure 'Navigating REACH' with all key information can be found on http://assets.panda.org/downloads/navigating_reach.pdf