

Working for a Healthy Environment for All



# Time to Act! Protecting Children from Hormone Disrupting Chemicals

Report on the Policy Dialogue, 19 February 2014, Brussels

*This project is supported by the Life+ project of the European Commission DG Environment*



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## Report on the Policy Dialogue of February 19<sup>th</sup> 2014, Brussels

# “Time to Act – Protecting Children from Hormone Disrupting Chemicals”

On February 19, the Policy Dialogue meeting “Time to Act – Protecting Children from EDCs” took place in Brussels.

The policy dialogue was organized by Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF, PAN-Europe and the Flemish League of Families, Gezinsbond, as part of the LIFE+ project “ChildProtect”<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of the meeting was to gain more understanding and support from policy makers and stakeholders in the task of speeding up EU action on protecting children from exposure to harmful ‘endocrine disrupting’ chemicals. This would be achieved through the ongoing EU processes of setting EDC criteria and developing an EDC strategy. In total, 60 participants were registered, of whom 40 participated.



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**ChildProtect**  
Protecting Children from  
Hormone Disrupting Chemicals

**Conference**  
**Time to act: Towards an EU policy to protect children from EDCs**  
Launch of the Life+ Project

### Better protection of children's health

Sascha Gabizon, WECF’s international Director, opened the Policy Dialogue session. She explained the aim of the meeting and introduced speakers and participants, among whom were representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, national

<sup>1</sup> The „ChildProtect“ project receives support from the LIFE+ program of the European Commission and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

governments, businesses and industry, science and medical organisations, WHO, NGOs and the media. Gabizon presented the 2.5-year project [“ChildProtect,”](#) which is co-funded by the European Commission LIFE+ program. She introduced the project partners WECF, [PAN-Europe](#) and the [Gezinsbond](#), and outlined their aim of improving the governance of chemicals of concern, such as EDCs, for the improved protection of children’s health. She explained how the project builds on the “Nesting” programs implemented in Germany, France, the Netherlands and seven other EU countries, and that it is in line with the implementation of EU directives and the pan-European PARMA process on Environment and Health.

### Unacceptable Levels

In order to receive some impression of the scope of the problem, the participants watched a five- minute trailer of the award-winning film "Unacceptable Levels," by Ed Brown. The trailer shoes extracts of interviews with policymakers and scientists on the gap between the risks which have been identified in EDC’s, and the lack of political action to minimise them. The trailer can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVB6XSyBTVE>



### Keynote presentation by TEDX

Carol Kwiatkowski from TEDX, California, gave a video presentation on the combined scientific evidence on hormone disrupting chemicals of the last 20 years. She presented overwhelming support for the application of the precautionary principle: to protect children; to reduce the increase of irreversible and long-term health damage; and to reduce the social and economic costs of this damage. TEDX estimates that the failure to regulate EDCs in the USA as costs taxpayers 1 trillion USD each year. In her presentation, Kwiatkowskireveals that the recent increase in endocrine-related diseases has coincided with the introduction of modern synthetic chemicals. She explains that research findings have concluded that these diseases are, at least sometimes, caused by exposure to endocrine disruptors. “We eat, drink and touch endocrine

disrupting chemicals every day.” Furthermore, Kwiatkowski argues that current government testing does not adequately test for endocrine disruption. In order to save lives and money, “better treatments are not the answer; it’s time to focus on prevention.” Watch her presentation here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdoyqblWD\\_k&list=PLB4C77224268BCCD3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdoyqblWD_k&list=PLB4C77224268BCCD3)

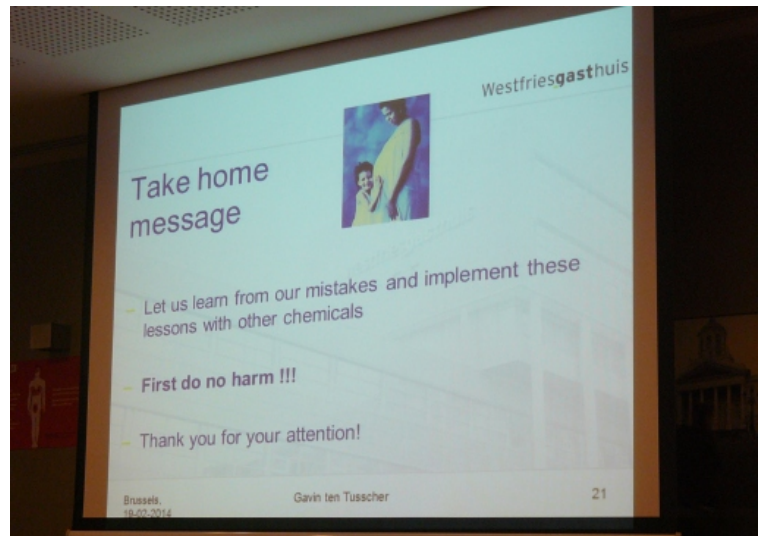


### **EDCs key challenge for European environment and health policies**

There is growing evidence to suggest that EDCs may result in permanent health damage to the hormone system of children. Pregnant women are exposed to these chemicals on a daily basis, transferring them to their child in the womb. EDCs can be found in, amongst other things: sprayed fruits and vegetables, plastics, bottles, cutlery, toiletries and cosmetics, toys, clothing and cleaning products. The World Health Organisation (‘WHO’) has highlighted the threat EDCs pose to human health and the European Environment Agency has echoed this in relation to the environment. EDCs have emerged as a key challenge for European environment and health policies, but the time-plan for action is being continuously delayed.

### **Children’s health should be our primary concern**

Dr. Gavin Ten Tusscher, head of the neonatal department of Dutch ‘Westfries’ hospital at the Westfries Gasthuis in Hoorn - where all medical devices have been made EDC-free over the past couple of years - opened the first session of the debate, explaining the effect of endocrine disruptors and ways children are exposed to them.



Scientific studies have shown the role of perinatal exposure to EDCs, which can trigger diseases as various as cancer, ADHD and diabetes, even later in life. Exposure to toxic and hormone disrupting chemicals such as DEHP is highest among the most vulnerable babies, born preterm and fed through nasogastric tubes for the first weeks of their lives. "These babies can receive up to 1000 times the dose an adult would, risking long-term, irreversible health effects such as testicular cancer, low semen quality and endometriosis," Dr Tusscher said, explaining why so many scientists are calling for urgent policy action to reduce children's exposure to EDCs in their daily lives. The American Medical Association has recommended that all hospitals choose DHEP-free medical devices, but few are doing so. "We are playing with fire", concluded Dr. Ten Tusscher. "Let us learn from our mistakes and implement these lessons with other chemicals. First do no harm."

### **Thanks to civil society progress has been made**

Corinne Lepage, French MEP for ALDE, prepared [her presentation for the event on video](#). She expressed how sorry she was that she was unable to attend the event in person, given her committed support to civil society's work on the cause.

"Thanks to civil society, we have made a lot of progress. Just think of the Westlund report on EDCs. However, a lot more progress could have been made. Just as in France, the European position towards EDCs is changing and drawbacks are appearing. Baroso has requested an impact assessment when what is really necessary is action now to protect public health. Unfortunately, EFSA is afraid to act, and the enormous weight of industry has prevailed over public health, creating a situation where a disaster waiting to happen. If civil society does not put any pressure on policymakers and politicians, the whole process will come to a standstill".

Lepage ended her message with the hope that 'common sense will prevail in the end.'



### **Study shows long term effects of EDCs**

Janna Koppe, Prof. em. of Neonatology at Amsterdam University, has presented studies showing that the long term effects of EDCs can even be transgenerational. The harmful effects of EDCs can be seen in the grandchildren of the exposed person. Avoiding EDCs during pregnancy is crucially important but almost impossible, given that EDCs can be found in food, plastics, toiletries and cleaning products. As such, regulations to prevent pregnant women from coming into contact with EDCs should be put in place. In the meantime, pregnant women



should be informed about the presence of EDCs in products so that they have the chance to buy healthier alternatives. As men's sperm is renewed every 3 months, it is important for the future father to also limit their exposure to EDC chemicals, especially in the period leading up to conception. Prof. Koppe called for a zero-tolerance approach to EDCs in products and in the environments of children and their parents.

### **Lunch-time interactive dialogue session**

A journalist from the news-service "Chemical Watch" moderated an interactive dialogue over lunch with the participants, in which the representative of the European Commission DG Sanco also participated. The European Union had planned to adopt a Strategy on EDCs and

related criteria in 2013, but this has been delayed and no new time-line has been made known. Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of WECF, noted that each year of delay, another 5 million children are born in the EU with a risk of long-term irreversible health impacts. This seems irresponsible. We need to put forward the arguments to protect children from hormone disrupting chemicals much more strongly, said Danish MEP Christel Schaldemose, who participated in the debate. "We can no longer wait". Reference was also made to the WESTLUND report on EDCs, in which MEPs called on the Commission to speed up action on EDCs.



**Hiltrud Breyer, German MEP for the Greens** was concerned by the approach of DG Sanco and shocked to find that, after a four-year leave from the Parliament, nothing had really changed and the European Commission had postponed any decision-making. "The interim criteria for EDCs adopted are not even being implemented," said Breyer. She continued, "it seems as if the European Commission is deregulating the existing EDC related legislation by delays or bad implementation". Representatives from the Chemical and Toys industry were asked for their opinions. One representative from the toys industry, a young father himself, stated that 'they are not the scientists', but that the toy industry will comply with any new legislation concerning safety and health. The report on the session by [Chemical Watch](#) can be found here.

### **Surprising announcement on Toys Safety Directive**

The policy dialogue meeting coincided with an EU decision, taken on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, to continue to allow nickel – a proven carcinogen - in children's toys. According to **Alexandra Caterbow, Senior Chemicals Expert at WECF**, this "shows us that our policy makers are not making our children's health the priority it should be." Nickel is on the list of restricted metal

elements under the new Toys Safety Directive (in force since July 2013), but has been exempted till date. Alexandra Caterbow judges this decision to be irresponsible, since nickel is classified as a Carcinogen category 2 and is a known allergen. "The derogation of use newly granted to nickel undermines the protective legal regime of the ban of the CMR compounds named by the Toys Safety Directive, which has ensured the best possible protection of children's health. The more derogations given to industry, the less protected our children are. Not only heavy metals but also Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals continue to be used in children's toys. "This situation must change very soon, especially in the case of 'non-essential' products like toys," stated Dr Tusscher. - "We should not only take phthalates out of toys for children aged three or below, but we should take all EDCs out of children's toys." See also [the opinion piece \(OP-ED\) by WECF](#) in Chemical Watch, on the problems with the Toys Safety Directive.



From right to left: Martine Röhl of the Belgian Federal Ministry, Martin Seychell of DG Sanco, WECF Director Sascha Gabizon, Peter Korytar of DG Environment and Genon Jensen, Director HEAL

### **Presentations by European Commission and Q&A session**

Martin Seychell, European Commission's DG Sanco, was the first speaker in the afternoon session. Mr. Seychell started by confirming that 'our citizens, our human resources, they are our key assets in the European Union'. He continued 'children are the most vulnerable and are in need higher protection' and added that 'we should not wait till we have absolute certainty'. However, Seychell defended the delays in the EDC criteria-setting and strategy development, explaining that 'we should work on the impact assessment; informed decisions are essential for good regulation of EDCs'. At the same time, Mr. Seychell mentioned the importance of the "proportionality" of measures, and touched on the "illusion" of protection through legislation.



These comments were taken up in the ensuing 'Question & Answer session' by MEP Hiltrud Breyer, who was worried that the Commission would not be willing to take the necessary legislative steps to better protect public health and children's health from, in particular, the risks of EDCs. Mr. Seychell justified the long delay in the development of EDC criteria and strategy with the argument that civil society should be given the chance to contribute to the impact assessment, which will be carried out this year. However, MEP Breyer asked why this impact assessment was not done earlier, as three years have gone by without any action being taken, and the criteria and strategy were supposed to have been finalized by now.

In his presentation, **Peter Korytar from DG Environment discussed** all EDC-related processes and the European Commission's overall strategy on EDC action, which, first published in 1999, will be revised this year and published in the second part of 2014. He outlined that since 1999, better testing methods for the identification of EDCs have been developed, as have stricter and clearer regulations, a greater understanding of EDCs, and a priority list for further research.

**Martine Röhl of the Belgian Federal Ministry** spoke in her presentation about the endocrine disruptors approach of the Department of Product Policy and Chemical Substances. She explained the SVHC (substances of very high concern) roadmap to the 2020 implementation plan, which hopes to identify all relevant SVHCs by 2020. Furthermore, she outlined the various REACH processes involved in the plan, including the testing of substances with special procedures in order to determine their potential SVHC status.

#### **HEAL (Health & Environment Alliance)**

**Genon Jensen, Director of HEAL**, stressed that protecting children's health from EDCs is a key concern for a great number of civil society and medical sector organisations. She continued that her organization and others are working together in the EDC-free Europe campaign to bridge the science-policy gap and ensure the application of the precautionary principle. The real risks EDCs pose to children have caused many individual European member states to take action. These include Sweden, Belgium, France and Denmark, which have all required the mandatory substitution of some chemicals suspected to contain EDCs beyond the current EU regulation limit, such as Bisphenol A and phthalates. Lisette van Vliet of HEAL called for the Commission to issue a comprehensive EU EDC strategy as soon as possible, stating that we could be incurring very high costs to society from delaying action on a wide range of suspected EDCs.

#### **Conclusion: Parents are concerned**

Sascha Gabizon of WECF concluded that immediate steps are necessary to protect this generation of children from the risks of EDCs. These should include information campaigns, targeted especially at pregnant women and parents of young children. She also recommended, as an intermediate step until legislation has been improved, the mandatory labeling of child and food products, which contain EDCs. "After a Dutch TV report on EDCs, our mailbox exploded. Parents are concerned. They want information and alternatives, but they don't get access to this information and continue to involuntarily expose their children to EDCs." Key points of action are:

- Protection of children by applying the precautionary principle, through the mandatory substitution of known EDC chemicals in children's products, neo-natal care and day-care centers.
- End the delay of the EU EDC criteria and strategy - every year 5 Million babies are born in the EU. Every delay poses health risks for them
- Ask governments to inform pregnant women in the EU immediately about EDCs and safer products and alternatives.

The ChildProtect Life project will have as its goal the protection of children from the adverse effects of EDCs. This parallels the EU goal envisaged for 2020, in relation to public health. The ChildProtect Life project will aim to help achieve this EU goal by hastening the creation of regulations requiring the substitution of EDCs.

**All presentations can be downloaded from the special webpage dedicated to the Brussels event: <http://www.wecf.eu/english/articles/2014/02/EDCconference-childprotect.php>**

[1] Nickel is a carcinogen class 2 and an allergen, which according to WECF has no place in children's toys.[2] DEHP is part of a group of chemicals called 'phthalates,' a plastic softener used in many plastics, including in medical device tubes. Non-DEHP medical tubes exist on the market, but few hospitals use them.



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## ANNEX

### Tools and Publications presented at the dialogue

#### EDC exhibition

An exhibition on EDCs, both in English and Dutch, can be obtained on loan from WECF.



**The healthy baby present box**, or so-called 'Green baby box,' was as an example of how socially responsible retailers can contribute to reducing the EDC risk for children. The Green baby box can be ordered from [BabyBeGood](http://www.babybegood.nl)



### **Publications presented at the conference**

The following reports were presented at the conference. For use by those interested:

- The EDC Consumer Information Guide (French, German, Dutch, English) can be downloaded [here](#)
- The consumer guide on Children's Textiles containing EDCs and other chemicals (in French, German, Dutch and English) can be obtained [here](#)
- Press release: "[Time to act: protecting children from hormone disrupting chemicals](#)"

### **Position Papers**

- Gezinsbond: Childnorm and EDCs (in Dutch) – [download here](#)
- WECF: Protecting Children from EDCs (in Dutch) – [download here](#)

Interested in cooperating with the LIFE+ "ChildProtect" team? Contact us at: [nesting@wecf.eu](mailto:nesting@wecf.eu) and read [the project page](#) on this website



## Protecting Children from Hormone Disrupting Chemicals

*The 'ChildProtect-Life' project coordinated by WECF with partners Gezinsbond and PAN Europe aims to speed-up implementation of EU environmental regulations with regard to the substitution of EDCs, in line with the EU 2020 goal of minimising adverse effects of chemicals on public health.*



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