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EU chemicals rules (REACH)

Milestone for protection from chemicals reached but serious vigilance still needed

An important stage in the implementation of landmark EU chemicals legislation (REACH) was reached today: from now on, chemicals manufacturers will only be allowed to continue selling the vast majority of chemicals if they have provided the necessary safety data (1). Green MEPs welcomed the deadline as a milestone for health and environment protection but cautioned on the need for vigilance in ensuring manufacturers have provided all relevant safety data. Commenting on this, Swedish Green MEP **Carl Schlyter** said:

"Today represents a milestone in the protection of public health and the environment from dangerous chemicals but serious vigilance is still needed. As of today, chemical companies will no longer be able to sell chemicals of high-volume or those that cause cancer without having provided a base set of safety information. This finally puts an end to decades of toxic ignorance.

"The big question however is whether companies have acted responsibly and have provided all relevant safety data or whether they have only submitted 'REACH light' dossiers, speculating on escaping compliance checks. If 50% of assessed registration dossiers continue to fall short of standards, as was reported by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) earlier this year (2), then REACH is bound to fail, as the Agency is only required to check 5% of all dossiers. The next months will be the litmus test for the chemical industry: they will show whether the majority of companies are responsible actors or not."

Finnish Green MEP **Satu Hassi** *added:*

"Twelve years after we started revising the previous failed chemicals legislation, we cannot afford another failure. We want REACH to become a success. The creation of ECHA and its high quality work to date is certainly an important success but crunch-time is still ahead. A lot of precious time to effectively act against the most hazardous substances was lost over the last few years due to internal conflicts in the Commission. Further important problems remain, such as how to deal with nanomaterials, or the combined effects of chemicals, or with substances in articles. Proper evaluation of the new registration dossiers, accelerated substitution of substances of very high concern and a swift solution of the yet unresolved problems will be decisive for the success of REACH."

(1) The legislation on the Registration, Evaluation, Restriction and Authorisation of Chemicals set 1 December 2010 as the deadline for chemical manufacturers and importers after which they may only continue selling high-volume chemicals - which account for more than 90% of the volume of chemicals placed on the market - and certain particularly hazardous chemicals if they have provided safety data for them. The deadline applies to three kinds of existing chemicals:

- chemicals manufactured/imported in quantities above 1,000 tonnes per year per manufacturer/importer;
- chemicals classified as very toxic to aquatic organisms manufactured/imported in quantities above 100 tonnes per year per manufacturer/importer ;
- chemicals classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to reproduction that are manufactured/imported in quantities above 1 tonne per year per manufacturer/importer.

(2) ECHA, February 2010, Evaluation under REACH

http://echa.europa.eu/doc/progress_report_2009.pdf

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