

SAFETY FIRST: A NEW CHEMICALS POLICY

Introduction

EU citizens are increasingly worried about chemicals in the air, water, soil and in daily food and consumer products. And they are right to be: 25 years of ineffective EU chemicals policy has allowed chemicals to accumulate in our environment and bodies. For about 90% of chemicals on the market there is no safety information available. The EU now has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to reform a flawed chemical management system.

The initial reform ideas from the European Commission, Parliament and Council in 2001 contained all the necessary elements to deal with current ignorance about chemicals, shifting the burden of proof on to industry, phasing out chemicals of very high concern and providing increased public information. But the reform has been seriously delayed and watered down due to chemical industry lobbying. The new Parliament has a vital role in making the reform a success for society – and the environment – as a whole.

THE NEXT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SHOULD:

1. Insist on an EU Chemicals Policy that establishes a paradigm shift, putting the precautionary principle into practice and reversing the burden of proof. The policy must incorporate the 'no data – no market' principle, apply the substitution principle, which means that hazardous chemicals (such as those that accumulate in our bodies or disrupt hormones) will only receive authorisation if there is an overriding societal need for this substance and no safer alternative is available. It should protect European consumers and guarantee full public access to relevant safety information about chemicals on their own and in products. It should lead to a phase-out of hazardous chemicals by 2020.
2. Resist the strong pressure from the chemical industry to water down the proposals the Commission will put on the table by the end of 2003/early 2004, and, instead, strengthen the legislation in line with the mentioned demands.
3. Organise its own promotion campaign for a Chemicals Policy that can be trusted by citizens, involving civil society organisations who represent the interests of society as a whole, rather than the narrow short-termism of industry federations.

What important decisions have been taken at EU level in the past?

There were votes in 2001 on the European Commission's White Paper (the Parliament asked for much more than the Commission), in 2003 to ban nonylphenol (extended the ban to including use in pesticides), and in 2002 to ban carcinogens, mutagens and reproductive toxins (CMRs).

What could have been better with a stronger pro-environmental vote in the EP?

The ban of nonylphenol use in pesticides should have been quicker and not just when authorisations expire.

The CMR ban should have been extended to ban their use in consumer articles

What is in the pipeline for the months after the elections?

The REACH first reading is the first big step planned for chemicals legislation,

Questions that could be asked to candidates to get to know their positions and level of commitment

If you are elected as MEP will you

- Vote for a phase-out of chemicals that accumulate in humans, wildlife or the environment, and those that interfere with our hormone systems or cause cancer?
- Vote against the flawed concept of 'adequate control' and vote for a mandatory substitution of such hazardous chemicals with safer alternatives?
- Vote to ensure that by 2015 high-quality safety information on chemicals produced in volumes above one tonne is held on a publicly accessible database. This database must include information on the properties of the chemicals, their production volumes, the producers' names, and exposure risks to humans and wildlife?
- Vote for a public right to know which dangerous chemicals are present in consumer products, including in all imported products?