

**Working  
Towards  
a Toxic  
Free  
Future**

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# 1

## Introduction Working Towards A Toxic Free Future

### THE CONFERENCE

In June 2003, 100 participants (primarily women, but also including a few very active male colleagues) from environmental, health, scientific, and policy-making backgrounds, from 20 countries participated in a conference in Soesterberg, the Netherlands, which focused on:

- the impact of toxic chemicals in our daily life
- the importance of civil participation in the EU Chemicals Policy Reform.



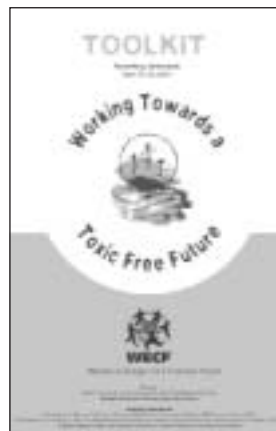
### THE TOOLKIT

WECF compiled a Toolkit for the conference which has more in depth briefings about toxic chemicals in our daily lives. It provides information, references and fact-sheets from a wide range of trusted sources on the following topics:

- Households,
- Cosmetics,
- Our Community,
- Health,
- EU Policy.

To order a copy of the Toolkit e-mail: [wecf@wecf.org](mailto:wecf@wecf.org)

Bringing a large group of women together to talk about the issue of chemicals and health was bound to be an exciting event. The knowledge, enthusiasm and determination of the women present was inspiring and motivating. This booklet has been inspired by the men and women who came together to discuss the need for making our world a safer place for future generations.



#### WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

- We want to live in a safer environment.
- We want our health and that of our families to be protected from exposures to toxic chemicals.
- We want to know that the products we buy are safe.
- We want our policy makers to protect our health before industry profit.
- We want children to be born free from toxic chemicals!

#### PURPOSE OF THE BOOKLET

This booklet (in combination with the Toolkit) will provide a solid starting point for women (and indeed all citizens) interested in learning about toxic chemicals and about concrete actions that they can take to make the world a healthier place for future generations.

It provides a brief overview of some of the topics of concern that were highlighted at the conference along with the ideas that were discussed on how to actually go about working for a toxic free future..... this is a guide for taking action!

## Why Should I Be Concerned?

We live in a society flooded by tens of thousands of manmade chemicals. In 1981 over 100,000 chemicals were registered in the European Inventory of Existing Commercial Substances (EINECS).

A number of these chemicals are known or suspected to be harmful to our environment and our health as they are persistent (they do not break down) and accumulate in the environment, humans and wildlife. Some synthetic chemicals can affect human health in negative and unexpected ways.... many are carcinogens, others can cause birth defects and still others can disrupt the hormone system. Unfortunately, most chemicals have never been assessed in terms of their possible harmful effects on health and environment, but many have been in widespread use since the early forties. This doesn't stop the flow of the increasing amounts of man-made chemicals being produced and released each year.

- There is no obligation for the EU chemical industry to generate safety data on chemicals that were on the market prior to 1981 - the majority of chemicals!
- The evidence suggests that industry has not generated this data: Only 14% of the EU high production volume chemicals - those 2593 chemicals produced and imported at over 1000 tonnes/year - have a full 'base set' publicly available;
- "If it is not possible to perform a hazard assessment for 95 % of the substances on the market then in reality these substances are not covered by the current legislation. This is a major problem in a nutshell: most substances on the market are in reality not covered by the current legislation." <sup>1</sup>

Chemicals are all around us, not only in laboratories and in the emissions of heavy industry, but also in our homes, even in house dust. They leach out of many products that we use in our daily lives and they accumulate in our bodies. As consumers of goods, women make many decisions about what they will purchase and bring into their homes. Our collective power as consumers is important and can be used to move the market towards safer alternatives.

Women, men and children all have different vulnerabilities to toxic chemicals. Although we are all vulnerable to certain toxics, it is often very surprising for people when they hear just how differently we are affected due to our physiological make-up. Women and men are obviously not the same, but according to Dr. Lilian Corra, Vice President of the International Society of Doctors for the Environment, “in addition to having a different anatomy, physiology and tendency to accumulate more fat than men (fat harbours some toxic chemicals), women also go through different developmental phases in their adult life and have different excretion and detoxification processes (e.g. pregnancy and/or menopause). Their different physiology results in different consequences to their health, thus gender should be taken into account when defining ‘levels of tolerance’. Also important is the fact that persistent toxic chemicals can accumulate in bone and fat deposits. If a woman gets pregnant, these toxic chemicals can be passed on to the embryo and foetus.” <sup>2</sup>

Citizens should have the “right to know” about which toxic chemicals are found in the products they use, and the effects of those chemicals on their health and environment. Toxic chemicals should not find a home in our bodies, we want them out!

The more we know, the better equipped we will be to demand the highest standards from our policy makers and producers of goods. In the next few pages we will focus on information and ideas for actions related to:

- Food
- Cosmetics
- Our Community
- Health.

# 3

## Protective measures we can take in our daily lives

### FOOD

Food is an important source which contributes to our body burden of potentially harmful chemicals. According to Professor Lucas Reijnders from the University of Amsterdam, “these include pesticides, nitrate, chlorinated dioxins, PCBs, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and metals such as mercury, lead and cadmium.”

Although some efforts have been made to control chemical exposures in food, Prof. Reijnders asserts that “for most of these chemicals a safe level of exposure has not been reached. Government policy to further lower exposure associated with the intake of food, seems often to have run out of steam. And for some substances (such as nitrate) control efforts seem to have failed or the exposure of the general public may even be increasing (probably cadmium)”.

**“New government policies can do much to improve food safety.”**

Individual citizens can make changes, but we can not entirely remove all of our exposures. The water that runs off a non-organic field can be full of pesticides that leach into our collective water systems and contaminate the air and soil of areas far away from the original source. According to Prof. Reijnders, “New government policies tackling outstanding health problems linked to chemicals can do much to improve food safety.” We need a strong agricultural policy that allows only the use of plant protection which is proven safe to human health and the environment. We need strict EU regulation to protect human health.

# What can I Do?

- A more vegetarian diet tends not only to be more balanced than the current average diet in industrialised countries but also carries less food borne infection risk and tends to be associated with lower 'chemical risk' (Prof. Lucas Reijnders);
- We can reduce our exposure to pesticides by buying organic food and promoting organic farming;
- Advocate for a strong promotion of organic farming, organic products and general food prices that reflect the total environmental costs;
- Use environmentally friendly alternatives in your garden;
- Help reduce the pollution caused by long distance food transport by buying food that is in season in your own region;
- Contact your local women's organisations (especially rural women's associations) and ask about their viewpoints and activities on these issues;
- Develop outreach material in your local language about health and food.



## COSMETICS

Cosmetics articles are intended to stay on the body's surface and not to affect the body's structure or functions. However, with many cosmetics that is not the case. Studies have found that many ingredients are making their way deeper into our bodies. Scientists aren't certain yet about all the long term effects of many of these chemicals. Environment and health organisations have been working with scientists gathering information about chemicals of concern in cosmetics for several years. The list below reveals some of their findings.

### PARABENS

**Found in:** toiletries such as deodorants and moisturisers, and food stuffs such as pie fillings, beers, and jam.

**Names to watch out for:** Alkyl parahydroxy Benzoates – butyl/metyl/etyl/propyl/isobutyl paraben.

**Used as:** Preservative.

**Research indicates:**

- parabens are oestrogen mimics.
- they can penetrate the skin.
- the effects of daily low level exposure to parabens in a number of different products is unknown.

### TRICLOSAN

**Found in:** deodorants, toothpaste, vaginal washes, clothing, liquid soaps, mouthwashes.

**Names to watch out for:** 5-chloro-2- (2,4-dichlorophenoxy)-phenol. May not be listed on label as contained in some trade-marked mixtures.

**Used as:** antibacterial

**Research indicates:**

- levels of triclosan have been found in human breast milk and in fish.
- dioxins (linked to cancer) are formed when it is manufactured or incinerated.

## **TOLUENE**

**Found in:** lacquers and nail polish.

**Names to watch out for:** toluol or methylbenzene.

**Research indicates:**

- occupational studies show exposed women likely to experience spontaneous abortions
- skin irritant and may cause liver damage
- narcotic in high concentrations
- toluene is volatile, flammable and attacks the central nervous system, eyes, blood, liver, kidneys and skin.

## **XYLENE**

**Found in:** lacquers and nail polish.

**Names to watch out for:** xylol or dimethylbenzene

**Research indicates:**

- skin and respiratory tract irritant
- may cause liver damage
- narcotic in high concentrations.

## **PPD**

**Found in:** dark hair dyes and 'black henna' (used for temporary tattoos).

**Names to watch out for:** p-phenylenediamine.

**Used as:** dyestuff.

**Research indicates:**

- linked to cancer in workers and users
- suspected mutagen
- associated with allergic reactions
- can penetrate the skin
- skin irritant.

## **BHT**

**Found in:** sun lotions, lipstick, face creams, mascara.

**Names to watch out for:** butylated hydroxytoluene, E321.

**Used as:** Antioxidant preservative.

**Research indicates:**

- possible allergen
- linked to possible behavioural effects and reproductive problems
- not allowed in baby foods.

## PROPYLENE GLYCOL

**Found in:** shampoo, sun lotion, body lotion, make-up / colour cosmetics.

**Names to watch out for:** propan-1,2-diol; PG.

**Used as:** a humectant, to maintain moisture.

**Research indicates:**

- can cause contact dermatitis linked to depression of the Central Nervous System.

## AHAS

**Found in:** bath and shower products, 'anti-aging' facial and body products.

**Names to watch out for:** alpha-hydroxy acids or 'fruit acids', including glycolic, lactic and citric acid.

**Used as:** pH regulators, exfoliants.

**Research indicates:**

- many reported adverse skin reactions in the US
- can penetrate the skin
- may increase sensitivity to sunlight, thus increasing photo-aging and risk of sun-related skin cancers.

## SODIUM LAURYL SULPHATE

**Found in:** bath and shower products, shampoo, toothpaste.

**Names to watch out for:** sodium lauryl sulfate; (as opposed to sodium laureth sulphate).

**Used as:** degreaser, emulsifying and foaming agent.

**Research indicates:**

- skin, eye and respiratory tract irritant
- may damage liver, lungs and immune system
- some evidence to suggest reproductive effects.



## PHTHALATES

**Found in:** hair sprays, perfume, nail polishes.

**Names to watch out for:** Anything ending in phthalate including - Dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), butyl benzyl phthalate BBP or BzBP) etc.

**Used as:** Plasticisers to soften plastic, as skin moisturisers and skin penetration enhancer in cosmetics.

**Research indicates:**

- DBP, DEHP and BBP are all known to cause serious reproductive and developmental effects in lab animals are linked to premature breast development in young girls and interference with reproductive development in male foetuses some phthalates act like hormone disruptors.
- growing evidence that phthalates can contribute to allergic disease - one Nordic study linked them to asthma - and other health problems. Phthalates have been banned in the US from children's toys because of fears about future fertility.

Source: WEN, first published in Branches, June 2002.

## “NOT TOO PRETTY” REPORT

The “Women’s Environmental Network (WEN), Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, and Health Care Without Harm contracted a certified Swedish analytical laboratory to test 34 name-brand cosmetic products for phthalates, a large family of synthetic chemicals linked to decreased fertility and reproductive defects. The laboratory found phthalates in nearly 80% of the products. More than half of the tested cosmetics contained more than one type of phthalate. Major brands included products by Boots, Christian Dior, L’Oreal, Procter & Gamble, Lever Fabergé, and Wella. None of the products listed phthalates as an ingredient on the label.”<sup>4</sup>



According to the report: “Companies say that the level of phthalates in their products is “safe.” That might be true if people were exposed to only one phthalate from one source at a time, but none of us is and the exposures add up. Since many phthalates have similar effects, we may be affected by the total exposure to this group of chemicals. What appears to be a “tolerable” level of exposure to a single phthalate could contribute to an unsafe overall exposure. Therefore, when possible, you may wish to reduce your use of cosmetics known to contain phthalates as well as plastic products made from soft PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic, also known as vinyl - products such as vinyl flooring, shower curtains, wallpaper and food containers.” <sup>5</sup>

## COSMETICS INDUSTRY

According to WEN, worldwide sales in the personal care industry are around \$122 billion annually. Women want cosmetics that are free of toxic chemicals, and clearly the industry has the funds to invest in safer alternatives. Women have a right to know what they are buying so clear labeling and a strict authorisation system are also crucial if we are to have truly safe products on the market.

**“Companies take notice of consumers writing to complain.”**

The average person sees between 400 and 600 advertisements per day. A large percentage of them are direct messages about beauty.

The cosmetics industry is big business, for instance in the UK in 2001 accounting for 8,200 million Euro in retail sales.

Approximately 10 Euro per household are spent on cosmetics products and treatments each week.<sup>6</sup>

Helen Lynn, Health Co-ordinator of the Women’s Environmental Network in the UK reported that “Companies said the only thing other than legislation that they would take any notice of is consumers writing to them to complain.” So remember ... as consumers we *can* move the market towards safer products!

- **Avoid buying products containing phthalates, artificial musks, bisphenol A, brominated flame retardants, methylparabens and other chemicals of concern (see chart above).**
- **Tell the politicians that it is their responsibility to safeguard citizens' health.**
- **Do a Toxic Tour of your make-up bag or bathroom cabinet.**
- **Find out what chemicals are in the products you use. Use the record sheets enclosed (annex 3) and send us the results. (wecf@wecf.org)**
- **Write to product manufacturers about what you've found out ask them to remove phthalates and other risky chemicals.**
- **Write to your MP or other elected representatives to alert them to the issue. Tell them your concerns!**
- **Question your local retailers (Ask them about the products they stock and ask them to order alternatives to risky products.)**
- **New EU chemical legislation doesn't cover cosmetic products, but will have an effect on raw materials - air your concerns - ask for more information.**
- **Promote safe alternatives or make your own cosmetics.**
- **Write to your favourite magazines about cosmetics advertisements and complain if you see some that are misleading.**
- **Visit websites of some of the organisations currently working on the chemical issue to learn more:**

[www.wecf.org](http://www.wecf.org),  
[www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk),  
[www.chemicalreaction.org](http://www.chemicalreaction.org),  
[www.chemsec.org](http://www.chemsec.org),  
[www.greenpeace.org/international\\_en/campaigns/intro?campaign\\_id=3941](http://www.greenpeace.org/international_en/campaigns/intro?campaign_id=3941),  
[www.beuc.org](http://www.beuc.org),  
[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org),  
[www.eeb.org/activities/chemicals/main.htm](http://www.eeb.org/activities/chemicals/main.htm),  
[www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk),  
[www.foe.co.uk/saferchemicals](http://www.foe.co.uk/saferchemicals)

## OUR COMMUNITY

There are many issues that should be considered while evaluating the hidden chemical dangers in our community. The following list gives just a few examples:

- toxic chemicals and heavy metals released into the air, water and soil from industries
- dioxin emitted by waste incinerators in the area
- pesticides and herbicides sprayed on park grounds, school yards and agricultural fields, contaminating children and workers, leaching into our water and soil, or ending as residues in our food
- contaminated water
- toxic paints
- toxic flame retardants and biocides used in carpets, clothing, textiles and home electronics
- air pollution from road traffic
- leakage of PCBs from old electrical generators and transformers
- evaporation from biocide-treated flooring or wood;
- plastic additives in construction material, upholstered furniture, electronics, textiles, clothing, etc...
- cleaning agents used in our household, workplace & schools

Which issues would you consider to be the most urgent in your home and in your community?

There are multiple sources of exposure from many known sources in our every day lives, many of which are serious threats to human health. Yet, when citizens demand a strong chemicals policy from the European Union, the industry responds by lobbying heavily against it. They claim that the proposed protective measures will cost them too much money.

### FINANCIAL ARGUMENTS FOR CITIZENS

In reality, the European Commission estimates that the proposed Chemicals Policy, REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation of Chemicals) will only cost the industry about 0.5% of their annual turnover.

It is difficult to estimate the true value/cost of good health for

ourselves, our children and for future generations. It is also not easy to estimate what it will cost us, the citizens of Europe, to continue down this current path. However, according to a member of the European Parliament, Inger Schörling, it's worth mentioning a few estimates:

- Allergies due to chemicals costs society an estimated 29 billion Euro annually in Europe (German Environment Ministry).
- 400.000 persons in Europe will die the coming decades of cancer caused by asbestos. The costs for society will be 400 billion Euro.
- The costs for the cleaning-up of contaminated areas are a large future environmental debt. The clean up costs for an area in Nyköping, Sweden, which was poisoned by dioxin is costing Sweden 6 billion Euro
- So far, the costs for recovering 6,5 tonnes of the 100 tonnes mercury on the market in Sweden have reached 2 million Euro. (source:International Chemicals Secretariat in Sweden).<sup>7</sup>

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by asbestos.**

Additionally, a recent study commissioned by the World Wild Fund for Nature in the UK, estimated health and environmental costs caused by chemicals up to 283 billion Euro over 30 years.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, we can save a lot of lives and money by preventing many of the future “clean up” and “health treatment” costs. However, convincing policy-makers

and industry to really do something about the long-term good of European citizens will be a challenge. We face a big obstacle....industry is lobbying the EU policy makers like never before on this issue. It will take active and consistent public participation during the next few years to ensure that public health and the environment take priority over industry profit.



## HEALTH

Toxicologists have become much more aware of the large differences in susceptibility, particularly associated with gender\*. The make up of a woman's body is more complicated than a man's due to the reproductive organs and processes. During pregnancy, the chemicals stored in a woman's body have the ability to cross the placenta where they may cause harm. Chemicals like phthalates - which are widely used in plastics, cosmetics and other everyday products - can potentially cause birth defects and can do more subtle damage to development of the foetus.

Chemical residues that have been accumulated in a woman's body over her life time and stored in fat are then used to produce breast milk. It is tragic that industrial chemicals have made their way into breast milk, as breast milk is the best food for babies (due to its immunological, nutritional and psychological benefits). Breastfeeding should be encouraged as it contains substances that help the child develop a stronger immune system and gives protection against environmental pollutants and pathogens. In this sense breastfeeding can help limit the damage caused by foetal exposure. Women should never be forced to debate between breast feeding and formula based on a fear of man-made contaminants in their milk. Producers of those contaminants should change their practices not women!

Like women, children are also more vulnerable to the impact of environmental pollution. They are exposed to more toxic chemicals in food, air and water than adults because relative to their size, they breathe twice as much air, eat three to four times more food, and drink as much as seven times more water. There is increasing scientific evidence that children face much higher cancer and developmental risks from exposure to environmental contaminants than adults. Children may absorb chemicals more efficiently, process them more slowly and eliminate them less efficiently than adults.<sup>9</sup>

We must move to a regulatory system that phases out unsustainable persistent toxic chemicals. Safer alternatives should be used (or

developed when necessary) instead of chemicals that can disrupt hormonal systems or build up in the bodies of people and wildlife. It is especially important to eliminate wherever possible, the unnecessary chemical exposure of children and women prior to and during pregnancy.

## ENDOCRINE DISRUPTION

**Endocrine System:** glands such as the pituitary and thyroid, that make hormones, among other activities.

**Hormones:** regulate how your body grows and functions.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Michael Warhurst of the World Wildlife Fund says “A growing number of chemicals have been found to interact with and disrupt the hormone systems of wildlife and humans. Tributyltin is the most extreme example (so far). Shellfish across the globe have been affected by imposex - with damaging effects on the population. There are many other chemicals of concern, for example

**“A growing number of chemicals have been found to interact with and disrupt the hormone systems of wildlife and humans.”**

bisphenol A was found to be an oestrogen mimic in 1938, but is widely used in polycarbonate plastics and coatings (e.g. used in baby bottles and milk cartons).” There is still significant controversy about low dose effects. Research has shown that human foetuses do have bisphenol A in their blood. Endocrine disrupting man-made chemicals do not belong in our bodies...we cannot be sure of the long term health effects, so we want them out.

A precautionary approach and common sense should guide our policy-maker's actions, but if that is not the case, then it's up to us to let them know what we want! Women can use their collective and individual voices to remind policy makers that they are first and foremost accountable to citizens. Our health and well being must take priority over industry profit.

- Don't be afraid to voice your concerns, you don't need to be a chemist to speak up;
- Find your friends and allies and join forces;
- Take action - organise "toxic tours"(see annex 3 or [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)), send petitions, write letters, think of your own creative ideas to get more people involved;
- Use the WECF toolkit to supply some basic material and references for local campaigning. The toolkit is in a binder for easy removal and photo copying!(To order a copy send an email to: [wecf@wecf.org](mailto:wecf@wecf.org));
- Ask your regional authorities about activities they are taking, give them new ideas;
- If those in power locally ignore you, try the national, EU and international level;
- Join an environmental or health NGO working on the issue of toxic chemicals;
- Translate useful material into your local language and contact WECF to discuss putting it on the web so more women can have access;
- Visit universities or other educational institutes to conduct outreach. Use occasions such as a Women's Day or meetings of organisations of women to give workshops or informative presentations, we can reach hundreds of women that way! Remember you can use this report, and the, Working Towards a Toxic Free Future Toolkit, Statement and Action plan!;
- Visit schools in your community and talk with teachers and parents about the importance of "healthy schools". Consider developing local language material to hand out (one good US-based website is: [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org));
- Co-operate with health experts, ask them to provide the consumers with health effects on these substances;
- Contact women in labour unions and talk about worker safety issues;
- See page 20 for ideas in your immediate surroundings ... .

## **PATHS OF EXPOSURE**

### **AIR**

#### **Outdoor:**

- Organic gardening - no pesticide use

#### **Indoor:**

- No pesticide use against insects
- No treated carpets
- Put food into re-usable containers, avoid single use options
- Use linoleum instead of PVC floorings
- Use wallpaper made of paper instead of vinyl
- No furniture with PVC (e.g. imitation leather)
- No Electronics with brominated flame retardants
- No phthalates in upholstered furniture and cars seats

### **SKIN**

- No mattresses / textiles with brominated flame retardants
- No textiles with phthalates (e.g. T-Shirts with PVC prints)
- No PVC gloves, rain gear, plastic boots
- No phthalates and synthetic musks in cosmetics

### **FOOD**

- Yes to Organic food - local and seasonal grown fruit and vegetables
- Any traditional grown fruit and vegetables should be washed thoroughly or if possible peeled
- No fatty food wrapped in plastic
- No soft PVC toys for babies and small children
- Choose your baby bottles carefully as some plastic bottle may leach phthalates and bisphenol A.
- If buying plastic bottles look for a guaranteed bottle free of both substances.

# 4

## Ideas on how to Influence EU Policy in 2004

### WHY IS THE EU IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE OF CHEMICALS?

The EU is currently designing a new policy on chemicals. That is important and offers a unique chance to make our voices heard! Member states will no longer control how chemicals are regulated. So if you want to improve the way chemicals are dealt with in your country, the EU is THE relevant platform!

As a major producer of chemicals the EU is also increasingly becoming a global leader on environmental policy. Currently, Europe supplies 29% of the worlds chemicals, second to the USA. We are also a major market with 375 million people in 15 countries. (As compared to The US populations of 275 million.)

This figure does not yet reflect the dramatic increase that will take place when accession countries join in June 2004.

### WHAT IS REACH?

REACH is an abbreviation for Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals. It has become the short name for the long new EU policy on chemicals that is now being developed. The new regulatory system will control the production, marketing and use of chemicals in Europe.

### REACH SO FAR...

A fundamental review of EU chemicals regulations has been underway for five years.

Some key events so far:

- The European Commission published a policy document, called the White Paper in February 2001. In this document they introduced the REACH concept
- Environment Ministers strengthened these proposals in June 2001. They included more chemicals in the category “high concern”, such as carcinogenic (CMR), Persistent, Bio accumulating and Toxic (PBT), very Persistent and Very Bio accumulating (vPvB) and endocrine disrupting chemicals.
- The European Parliament issued a report concerning the White Paper in November 2001, in which they did not agree to all changes the Environment Ministers had proposed, but still they were supportive of the White paper in general.
- October 2003 the European Commission published the long awaited Proposal for a Directive, based on the White Paper and all discussion that had followed since.

#### WHAT DO NGO’S THINK ABOUT THE PROPOSAL OF OCTOBER 2003?

The final Proposal of the European Commission disappointed most non-governmental organisations (NGOs), due to the fact that it was not as strong as they had hoped. Industry lobby had watered down earlier drafts significantly. In a common reaction, co-signed by WECF (see Annex), they stated:

- two-thirds of all chemicals on the registry might still not carry enough safety information.
- Furthermore, the proposal overturns existing EU principles. EU workers’ protection and environment legislation emphasises the need to eliminate and substitute hazardous chemicals. But the Commission proposes simply to minimise exposure through ‘adequate control’, without getting rid of them altogether. This could allow the continued use of chemicals accumulating in breast milk, reducing fertility and causing allergies in everyday consumer products, such as children’s toys, carpets and many other household goods.

The **good news** is that there are many opportunities to influence the European Parliament and the EU Council, who have to commonly decide over the proposal in the next two years.

The **other good news** is that there is increasingly closer collaboration among NGOs in Europe. Environmental organisations are also increasingly interested in working together with women's groups. *So that the voice of women can be heard more strongly in future!*

NGOs want a strong REACH, but given the fact that the number of organisations working on EU chemicals policy is limited, while business has stepped up its lobbying efforts, the lobby of NGOs to improve the EU chemicals policy could use more help, especially from women.

## CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

Another reason to get involved in improving chemicals policy is the strong lobby of the chemical industry. The chemical industry is the third largest manufacturing industry in the EU, with considerable lobbying resources in Brussels and beyond. They have exaggerated the total cost figures of REACH quite a bit, and European leaders have been influenced by them, in spite of the recent estimates by the European Commission, which showed a cost figure for chemical industry of 0.05 % of the annual turnover. Unfortunately, by that time Schröder, Blair and Chirac had already written a letter to the European Commission warning them about the negative impact the proposed legislation would have on the competitiveness of European industry.

## WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN IN 2004 (AND BEYOND)?

- The European Parliament and the European Council (Environment and Enterprise/Industry Ministers of the member states) will take positions on the proposal of the European Commission
- They will do that over the next 2 years. During that period there will be two readings in Parliament and a common position in the Council;
- In a so called 'conciliation phase' the Council and Parliament must agree on a final text within a certain time frame
- The "Directive" will then become "law" in all 25 Member States

- # What can I do?
- Encourage campaigns in your country or community in favour of a strict chemicals policy
  - Continuously increase general awareness of the impact of chemicals on human health (see chart on pgs. 5-6 and the toolkit); education can't be underestimated!
  - Check the website: [www.chemicalreaction.org](http://www.chemicalreaction.org) to find the latest information, arguments, example letters, names and addresses of policy makers in your country, and opportunities to influence.
  - Lobby your Member of the European Parliament (MEP). Find out which MEP lives closest to you and can be contacted by you. Ask them to have 'body burden' blood tests done on themselves (to measure particular chemicals in their blood);
  - Lobby on the need for transparency and stronger "Right to Know" legislation in relation to chemicals. (Including an accessible toxic emissions register and clearer product labelling laws);
  - Influence your government, in particular your Environment and Health Ministers
  - Spread information on your government's position to other NGOs; that might help them in their lobby;
  - Contact the local and national press about your activities;
  - Encourage those industries which will benefit from REACH to speak up;
  - Contact WECF if you have any questions or problems.



## Conclusion: Taking Action!

This booklet is the follow up from the “Working Towards A Toxic Free Future” conference, to be used in combination with the Toolkit. It highlights the concrete ideas about working for change that came out of the conference in June 2003.

If you are not already working on these issues, and would like to learn more about toxic chemicals, you can order a toolkit from: [wecf@wecf.org](mailto:wecf@wecf.org) and/or visit some of the websites page 14. WECF can also assist your organisation with expertise and practical advice. Particularly, if you want to organise a workshop or make educational or lobby materials on chemicals, health and environment.

### **The main points:**

- **Don't be afraid to speak out to the public, to industry and to policy makers!**
- **Establish partnerships with allies that are interested in working with you! (Individuals and NGOs) We can't all be experts, but we can help mobilise them.**
- **Refuse to be the guinea pig for untested or unsafe chemicals.**
- **Use your power as a consumer to support safer products.**
- **Spread the information about toxic chemicals to your community.**
- **Encourage your leaders to support a strong chemicals policy (REACH).**
- **Organise workshops and discussions with women and between women and retailers, responsible authorities on chemicals, health and environment.**

Member of the European Parliament, Inger Schörling, said it very well at the Soesterberg “Working Towards a Toxic Free Future” conference,

**“...We now have a unique chance to create a sustainable chemicals policy, which is able to protect public health and the environment. The corner stones are: Reversed burden of proof, lack of data stops sales of the product, precautionary principle and phase-out of dangerous substances, substitution-principle applied, exchange of information between producers and users, increased information and consultation for consumer.**

**Your organisation, Women in Europe For A Common Future (WECF) and the network that we are all a part of after this conference is of great importance for a safer future, for safer chemicals. We have to counter the industry lobbying, we have a chance to make a real difference.**

**Let’s raise our voices!”**

## NOTES

- 1 Warhurst, Dr. Michael, World Wildlife Fund, EU Toxics Senior Programme Officer, "Working Towards A Toxic Free Future" conference presentation, June 2003.
- 2 Corra, Dr. Lilian, Vice President, International Society of Doctors for the Environment-ISDE, President of Argentine Association of Doctors for the Environment. "Working Towards A Toxic Free Future" conference presentation, June 2003.
- 3 Reijnders, Lucas. "Chemicals in our food", Stichting Natuur en Milieu/ IBED/ ECDO, University of Amsterdam, 2003.
- 4 Joseph Di Gangi, PhD, "Pretty Nasty-Phthalates in European Cosmetic Products", Copyright 2002 by Health Care Without Harm.  
[www.nottoopretty.org](http://www.nottoopretty.org)
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Women's Environmental Network Briefing, [www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)
- 7 Source of list of cost estimates: Presentation of Member of the European Parliament, Inger Schorling, at the Soeterberg Conference, June 2003.
- 8 David Pearce and Phoebe Koundouri: The social costs of chemicals - The Cost and Benefits of Future Chemicals Policy in the European Union, WWF UK, May 2003  
\* Gender is used to describe those characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles.
- 9 Dorey, Catherine N., in Chemical Legacy. Contamination of the Child, London Oct. 2003)
- 10 Definitions from WEN factsheet, "Chemicals and cosmetics - what's the problem?", first published in Branches, WEN 2002. Updated Sep. 2003.

# A Call For Action! Working Towards a Toxic Free Future

## Soesterberg Statement - 2003

### THE PROBLEM

#### HUNDREDS OF TOXIC CHEMICALS IN HUMANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

We know from scientific publications and European Commission findings, that a large number of man-made chemicals that have been released into the environment, have the potential to disrupt the endocrine, neurodevelopmental, immune and central nervous systems of humans. The developing foetus and young children are especially vulnerable to developmental disorders from early exposures.

Every person in Europe has a body-burden of hundreds of man-made chemicals. A percentage of the European population has such a high body-burden that it can damage the child while it is developing in the womb. Recent studies for example by the medical universities of Amsterdam, Groningen and Leiden show that each year 10.000 - 20.000 children are born in the Netherlands (5-10 % of total number of births p/a) with such high levels of toxic chemicals (from exposure during prenatal development) that these exceed WHO acceptable standards of safety. These children are at great risk of suffering adverse mental and/or physical health effects.

Toxic chemicals affect women differently from men. There is evidence that in the last 40 years the increase of diseases such as breast-cancer and endometriosis is linked to high body-burdens of toxic chemicals. Established risk factors such as ageing, early menarche, late menopause, late childbirth, hereditary factors, and exposure to ionising radiation can only explain about 25-50% of

breast cancer cases. That leaves the other 50-75% of cases with no known cause. Various chemicals that we are currently being exposed to in daily life are known to be carcinogenic and linked to the suppression of the immune system. We are all exposed to multiple types of chemicals, a “cocktail of chemicals”. Safety standards usually ignore these multiple exposures, as well as existing body burdens. There is also increasing evidence that the increased rates of Hypospadias (a birth defect of the penis), testicular cancer and reduced sperm counts are related to high levels of man-made chemicals in the body. As a recent study on chemicals in products, of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollutions states, “we are all guinea pigs in a world-wide experiment”. This situation is immoral and unsustainable. We do not want our children to be the testing grounds for the chemical industry.

We therefore demand from our governments that they adopt forward-looking policies that will ensure that our food, drinking water, cosmetics, air and soil are toxic-free and safe. We want the contamination of our bodies with toxic chemicals to stop. In order to do that, policy makers and decision makers must consider the long-term health and safety of the population and take into account the aggregate exposures that we are all receiving through our daily activities and products.

## **WE THEREFORE**

**CALL ON INDUSTRY to stop contaminating our bodies and our children with toxic chemicals.**

Children have the basic human right to be born chemical-free. They should not be the guinea-pigs for chemicals that are suspected or already known to be harmful to their development. We all have the right to have our bodies protected from multiple toxic chemical exposures,

**CALL ON OUR GOVERNMENTS to ensure that this fundamental human right is protected, by supporting and strengthening the EU REACH proposal** (a legislation tool for Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals).

REACH should include:

- phase out of most hazardous chemicals,
- substitution of hazardous chemicals with safe alternatives,
- health of women, children and workers has to be the baseline for assessment of risks,
- information to users must be clear and accessible including the labelling of all product contents,
- and, imported products should be included under the scope of the system,



**CALL FOR the use of assessment standards that use the health of women and children (including reproductive and prenatal health) as the baseline to measure the safety of chemicals,**

**CALL FOR systematic registration of environmental and occupational health problems as experienced by citizens,**

**CALL FOR the use of biomarkers of exposure and effect to assess long term effects of industrial pollution on the population,**

**CALL FOR** continuation of longitudinal studies of children whose exposure level to toxic chemicals at birth is known, to assess chemicals-related health and developmental problems later in life,

**CALL ON** health experts to cooperate in our campaign,

**CALL FOR** more structural education of health professionals, policy makers and civil servants at all levels on environment in relation to health. Additional education on health and environmental issues is also needed at training programs, university and post graduate levels.

We, participants in the conference: “Working Towards a Toxic Free Future”, hereby commit to:

- World wide women’s solidarity for a toxic-free future.
- Conduct outreach and education campaigns to ensure that increasing numbers of women are informed about the sources and health effects of toxic chemicals in our environment and the products we buy.
- Promote informed consumption of sustainable and safer alternatives through outreach material and education.
- Contact our government representatives to ensure that they adopt the EU proposed policy on chemicals, REACH, as soon as possible.
- Contact manufacturers and retailers to tell them that we are concerned about the toxic chemicals in their products and want them to substitute them with safest possible alternatives, and when no alternative exists, to quickly, develop new sustainable alternatives.

# Press Release

## SLIMMED-DOWN REACH NEEDS HEALTHY SUPPLEMENTS

Brussels, 29 October 2003 Environmental, health and women's NGOs were disappointed with today's European Commission decision to put chemicals producers interests before public health and the environment in adopting its proposal for regulating chemical safety: REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals). After five years of discussion and many delays, the Commission has finally proposed a Regulation to reform the existing flawed rules on chemical management. But it is a mere shadow of plans drafted earlier this year, having been watered down to suit many unjustified industry demands.

Eleven years after the law is finally adopted, two-thirds of all chemicals on the registry might still not carry enough safety information. Furthermore, the proposal overturns existing EU principles. EU workers protection and environment legislation emphasises the need to eliminate and substitute hazardous chemicals, but the Commission now proposes simply to minimise exposure through adequate control, without getting rid of them altogether. This could allow the continued use of chemicals accumulating in breast milk, reducing fertility and causing allergies in everyday consumer products, such as children's toys, carpets and many other household goods.

"A few big and dirty companies have driven the Commission to set a dangerous precedent: allowing specific business interests to prevail public health and environment protection. The Commission intends to test REACH together with industry. We insist that the





Commission includes in the testing the achievements for public health and environment," said John Hontelez, Secretary General of the European Environmental Bureau.

"The loophole for hazardous chemicals is a very serious flaw in this draft. Parliament and national governments must use their chance to close this. Citizens health must come first," said Mary Taylor from Friends of the Earth UK.

"REACH has been stripped down to its bare bones. While we are happy that the skeleton is now out of the cupboard, we expect it to be fully fleshed out before it becomes law," said Jorgo Iwasaki Riss of Greenpeace.

"It has taken 30 years for the EU to address the issue of the health impact of dangerous chemicals. Unfortunately, the REACH proposals do not yet show the way out of using hazardous chemicals in everyday consumer goods," stated Tamsin Rose, General Secretary of the European Public Health Alliance.

"We don't want our right to live and work in a healthy environment to be compromised. We need our Parliament and Council to strengthen the EU chemical policy proposal, and ensure that the protection of health comes first," said Sylvia Altamira of Women in Europe for a Common Future.

For further information, contact:

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Sylvia Altamira, Women In Europe For A Common Future: [wecf@wecf.org](mailto:wecf@wecf.org)

# Toxic Tour: What's in my cosmetics?

WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

NAMES TO WATCH OUT FOR	EFFECTS	Enter name & brand of product in the box below (e.g. Intensive Hand & Body Lotion, Boots)		
		Y/N	Y/N	Y/N
<b>AHAs - Alpha-hydroxy acids</b> (or 'fruit acids'; incl. Glycolic acid and lactic acid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can penetrate the skin</li> <li>• Many reported adverse skin reactions in the US</li> <li>• May increase sensitivity to sunlight therefore increase photo-aging and risk of sun-related skin cancers</li> </ul>			
<b>BHT</b> butylated hydroxytoluene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Preservative antioxidants</b></li> <li>• Possible allergen</li> <li>• Has been linked to possible behavioural effects, reproductive failures, not allowed in baby food</li> </ul>			
<b>Fragrance</b> (Parfum, or Aroma.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Can exacerbate asthmatic symptoms.</b></li> <li>• May contain chemicals linked to cancer, damaging to the liver and kidneys and toxic to the nervous system.</li> </ul>			
<b>Parabens</b> (Alkyl parahydroxy benzoates, or butyl/methyl/ethyl/propyl/isobutyl)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Oestrogen mimics</b></li> <li>• Can penetrate the skin (paraben)</li> </ul>			
<b>Phthalates</b> (Dibutyl (DBP), di(2-ethyl-hexyl) (DEHP), di-ethyl phthalate (DEP), butyl benzylphthalate (BBP))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>risk to pregnant women and unborn children;</b></li> <li>• DBP and DEHP on EU list of banned substances to be phased out by early 2005</li> <li>• May disrupt hormones and cause birth defects</li> <li>• Linked to asthma and allergic disease</li> </ul>			
<b>P-Phenylenediamine</b> (PPD, or Para-phenylene-diamine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Linked to cancer in workers</b></li> <li>• Linked to asthma and allergic disease.</li> <li>• Can penetrate skin.</li> <li>• Skin irritant</li> </ul>			
<b>Triclosan</b> (5-chloro-2 (2,4-dichlorophenoxy)-phenol) or Trade name Microban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bioaccumulative</b> - builds up in fatty tissue and can't be broken down properly.</li> <li>• has been found in human breast milk and fish</li> <li>• Dioxins (linked to cancer) are formed when it is manufactured, incinerated or exposed to sun light.</li> </ul>			
<b>Sodium Lauryl Sulphate</b> (Sodium Lauryl Sulfate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Skin, eye and respiratory tract irritant.</b></li> <li>• May damage liver, lungs and immune system.</li> <li>• Some evidence to suggest reproductive effects.</li> </ul>			
<b>Toluene</b> (Toloul, methylbenzene)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Risk to women workers of spontaneous abortions</b></li> <li>• Skin irritant</li> <li>• Toxic to central nervous system, eyes, blood, liver, kidneys and skin.</li> </ul>			
<b>Propylene glycol</b> (propan-1,2-diol)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Humectant</b> - used to maintain moisture.</li> <li>• Can cause contact dermatitis</li> <li>• Linked to depression of the CNS (Central Nervous System)</li> </ul>			

# Letter to President Chirac

Monsieur le Président de la République Jacques Chirac  
Palais de l'Elysée  
55, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré  
F-75008 Paris  
France

October 9, 2003

Dear President Chirac,

Women in Europe For A Common Future, a pan-European network of organisations with 56 members in 26 countries, is surprised and concerned about the letter you sent to Mr. Prodi regarding the review of the EU chemicals policy.

We have an important question and would appreciate an answer: what takes a higher priority in your list of responsibilities, protecting the health of your citizens (and that of future generations) or industry profit?

In your letter you stated that *"A future EU chemicals policy must be designed in such a way as to ensure environmental health and consumer protection without endangering the international competitiveness of the European chemical industry."* We understand that industry competitiveness is important, and that there is strong lobbying from the US industry (and current governing administration) to weaken the chemicals policy. However, you are first and foremost accountable to us, the citizens of Europe. Without a healthy population, what kind of future can Europe have?

The benefits of chemicals policy reform far outweigh the costs. Conservative estimates of direct costs to the EU chemicals industry are in the range of  $\approx$ 1-7 billion over 10 years. This represents around 0.1 % of annual turnover, 5% of annual R&D budgets or 5% of annual environmental spending, hardly a big figure. That sum will be more than made up for by cost savings elsewhere. The draft Risk & Policy Analysts Limited (RPA) report 2003 (commissioned by DG Environment unreleased) estimates that the occupational health benefits alone, will add up to about  $\approx$ 18-54 billion over a 30 year period. Currently the taxpayers, citizens, and social and health institutions are burdened with paying the costs related to an increasing number of cancer cases, children with learning disabilities, neuro-developmental problems, asthma, etc., linked to chemical pollution. Our children are not able to defend themselves from multiple exposures to hazardous chemicals, that is your job!

Women are very concerned about the uncontrollable risks caused by the current system of production and use of chemicals. The increased body burden of toxic chemicals, which we now all carry, constitutes a real threat for human health and well-being. Additionally, pregnant women are of great concern, as the safe development of the foetus (in its most vulnerable phase) is at risk.

- Up to 700 man-made chemical contaminants have been detected in human body tissue.
- University research shows that up to 20.000 children (5 -10%) born each year in the Netherlands alone, suffer the effects of their mothers' body burden of dioxins (see below). Observed effects include breathing difficulties, blood and immune disorders, learning difficulties and congenital defects.

WECF asks you to support the strengthening of the chemicals policy and put the protection of human health at the top of your list of priorities.

### **Children are not little adults.**

They are the most vulnerable to the adverse health effects of many toxic chemicals. Cancer, learning disabilities, decreasing sperm counts, increasing allergies and asthma cases are of concern to all

human beings. Our right to live and work in a healthy environment and to know what harmful chemicals are in our environment, our bodies, and in the goods we purchase is currently compromised. Families can protect their children only within limits, and only if enough information is available for parents to make informed choices. However, exposure to toxic chemicals through our air, water, soil and household goods is not all in our own control. We need our policy-makers to ensure that industry provides the safest possible alternatives.

Instead of asking for even more studies on the effects on industry competitiveness and profits, why aren't you asking for studies on the long and short term effects that such a policy (or lack of it) could have on human health? For example, there are a surprising number of teachers and parents complaining about the increasing number of children with learning disabilities, concentration difficulties, allergies and behavioural problems. There is increasing evidence that exposure during the sensitive perinatal period may result in permanent disturbances and affect neurological development. A good example is dioxin; the studies (mentioned above) by three Dutch Universities, which studied children from birth until 6 or 12 years of age, have found negative health effects in children exposed to "background levels" of dioxins. Five to ten percent of women still have a high body burden of dioxins. That means 10.000 to 20.000 children born each year in the Netherlands alone, are being exposed to high concentrations every year.

How many children are being harmed by toxic chemicals in subtle ways that are difficult to trace back to a particular source? How can we protect children when they are exposed to multiple unknown sources?

We urge you to use common sense, and not only initiate more studies on these issues, but also take precautionary measures in terms of policy.

The EU chemicals industry can lead the way to sustainability. The European chemical industry should be responsible for proving the safety of their products or those products should not be on the

market. It's that simple. Our children are not their guinea pigs. Industry spends a huge amount per year on advertising. Instead of opposing REACH the chemical industry should embrace the new legislation, which will also improve the poor image the industry currently has among EU citizens. Studies have shown that industries which lead the pathway to sustainability actually stand to profit from taking such a lead in the long run.

We ask you to advocate for a strong chemicals policy. We do not have millions of dollars to lobby like the industry is doing. However, your responsibility is still to us. We are the citizens who elected you to protect our fundamental rights, our health and our future.

We hope that we can count on you to protect the health of EU citizens and future generations.

Sincerely,

Femmes et Changement (France)  
Women In Europe For A Common Future

Céline Ostyn, President

Marie Kranendonk, President

et

Centre National d'information indépendante sur le dechet (CNIID)  
(France)

Aurélié Gauthier,

Chargée de la Campagne 'd'Abord ne pas nuire'

cc: Prime Minister Tony Blair

Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder

Prof. Romano Prodi

\* The EC financial figures above are from October 2003, new estimates show even lower costs for industry.

\*\* NB sources available upon request

## WECF

Women in Europe For A Common Future, is a network of women's organisations that was established in 1993 as a result of the UNCED Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Today, we have expanded to over 50 member organisations from across Europe working together on issues related to sustainable development, gender and health. With the current revision of the EU Chemicals Policy it is a crucial time for women to take action and make our voices heard! In our experience, once people know more about the effects of daily-use chemicals on the health of vulnerable groups...such as women and children, many become active supporters for stricter regulations. We strive to support women interested in taking action by providing useful information, contacts and resources.

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