

Have you heard that there may be:

A toxics free future within REACH

A major EU reform on chemicals
A challenge for the new European Parliament
An opportunity that cannot be missed



Chemicals out of control

Endocrine disrupters in children's toys ¹

Toxic house dusts - are they in your home? ²

Chemicals Allergies - Doctors speak out. ³

Does your computer emit brominated flame retardants? ⁴

How many times in recent years have you heard about new scientific evidence of hazards related to a chemical used in everyday life?

- Was it unclear how hazardous the substance was?
- Was it unclear how ordinary consumers could protect themselves?
- Were the authorities' reactions vague and unclear?

That is because there is little knowledge about potential hazards from most of the chemicals on the European market. There is a fundamental lack of control of the many tens of thousands of man-made chemicals that are produced and marketed every day.

Global production of organic chemicals over 5 decades

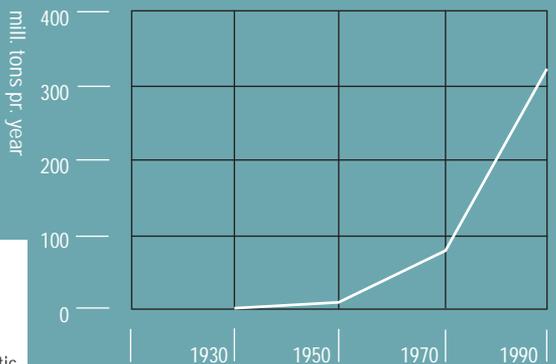


Figure 1: Global production of organic synthetic chemicals. – Danish Board of Technology (1996).

The backlog of the current system

The legislation on hazardous chemicals has not developed at the same pace as the production. There is a backlog in modern chemicals legislation.

Lack of Information

There are no obligations on producers and importers to provide hazard data for existing chemicals.

+

Lack of Regulation

The human and financial resources to control chemicals are limited and the legal instruments are inefficient.

=

Unacceptable situation

Inadequate control of the risks from the numerous hazardous chemicals on the market, in the environment, and in our bodies.

- 1: FDA warns DEHP plasticizer may be harmful to male children. American Academy of Pediatrics. Wallace, AAP News. 2002; 21: 140-141.
- 2: Consuming Chemicals. Hazardous chemicals in house dust as an indicator of chemical exposure in the home. Greenpeace, 2003. www.greenpeace.org
- 3: 'Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Recognition & Management. A document on the health effects of everyday chemical exposures and their implications'. Third Scientific Report of The British Society for Allergy, Environmental and Nutritional Medicine. K. K. Eaton and H.M. Anthony (moderators). www.foe.co.uk
- 4: Flame Retardants and Plasticisers on particulate - in the modern Computerized Indoor Environment, Bergman et al. (1997) Organohalogen Compounds, vol 33.

New system to protect environment and health

Growing concern among Member States has led the European Union to embark on a fundamental restructuring of the policies that guide the management of chemicals. The aim is to create a new system that will ensure adequate protection of human health and the environment.

Unfortunate interference

On October 29, 2003, the European Commission presented its final proposal for a new reform. Unfortunately, however, interference from the chemical industry had led the European Commission to considerably weaken their final proposal compared to the original plans. It is important to recognise that the current proposal is weaker than existing legislation on some important points. If too many loopholes and exemptions are accepted, REACH will be of little or no benefit for human health and the environment.

REACH still has enormous potential

REACH needs to regain strength, but currently it holds its position as the right framework. The reform still has the potential of becoming the most important legal act for protection of public health and the environment in the history of the EU.

Crucial period: 2004 - 2005

In November 2003, the proposal was passed on to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. It is now up to the Parliament and the Member States to examine the text and propose amendments.

New EU chemicals policy reform - a step forward for sustainable development

REACH

Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals

Registration:

In the future chemicals must be tested before marketing. This basic "no data - no marketing" principle will help bring an end to the current massive lack of information. About 30.000 existing chemicals will be phased in to this system.

Evaluation:

Authorities will evaluate the data to see if there is cause for concern.

Authorisation:

The most dangerous chemicals may only be used for those purposes that are specifically authorised by the Commission.

REACH will come!

There is little doubt that some day a reform by the name of REACH will be implemented
- The important questions are:

Will it work?

Will Council and Parliament realise that the chance to move on to a new path of sustainable development is NOW?

Or will they waiver?

Will Council and Parliament waiver and implement a crippled piece of environmental and health legislation?

Two possible versions of REACH:

The effective version

Enhance the competitiveness of the European Industry based on sound chemicals management

Makes "no data - no marketing" a real principle (disqualifies freeriders)

Encourage substitution of chemicals that pose a risk to humans and environment

Sets minimum requirements for substance evaluations

Includes all hazardous chemicals in articles (products)

Provides access to information for professional and ordinary consumers

Does not curtail harmonised classification.

The crippled version

Enhance the competitiveness of the chemicals industry on a short term basis by making bad performance competitively advantageous

Waiver on hazard data requirements (unknown hazards still on the market)

Keep the current Authorisation system, where substitution is not the first option

Does not require that Member States provide resources for substance evaluations

Provides little control of hazardous chemicals in articles

Sets confidentiality concerns before public right to know

Trust chemical producers to decide alone whether their chemicals pose long term threats to health and environment

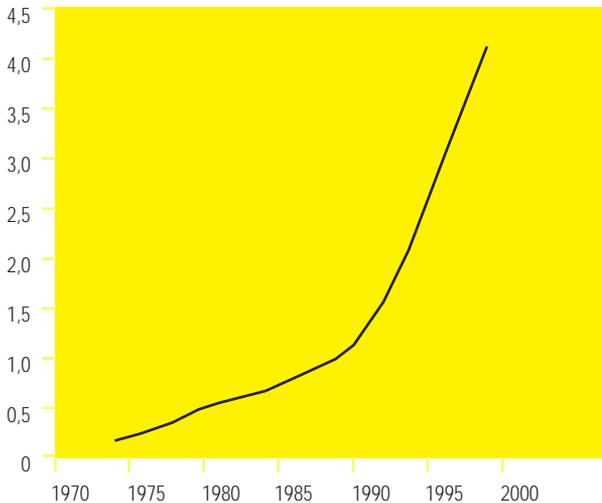
Chemical companies are against REACH - or are they?

Major European chemical industries' organisations have publicly opposed REACH. This opposition was primarily based on estimated costs that were later shown to be exaggerated or based on unverifiable assumption. These estimates have, however, caused much concern in many smaller companies and among downstream users. In addition, many members of national parliaments as well as the European Parliament have received the impression that most companies are against REACH.

In contradiction to the above, a study among Nordic industrial organisations (see back page) shows that REACH is received much more favourably than it may seem from the current debate. Many industrial organisations acknowledge that they might benefit from REACH. The current system demands little information from chemical producers and thus moves the responsibility of providing information and deciding on risk management measures on to the downstream users of chemicals. Consequently, many downstream users spend much time searching for information. Moreover, many companies would benefit from a new system of simple, predictable and homogenous legislation, which would rebuild trust among consumers and improve workers' health.

No restrictions

µg/g lipids Brominated flame retardants in human breast milk



Noren and Meironyté, Chemosphere 40, 2000

Potential benefits for society & industry

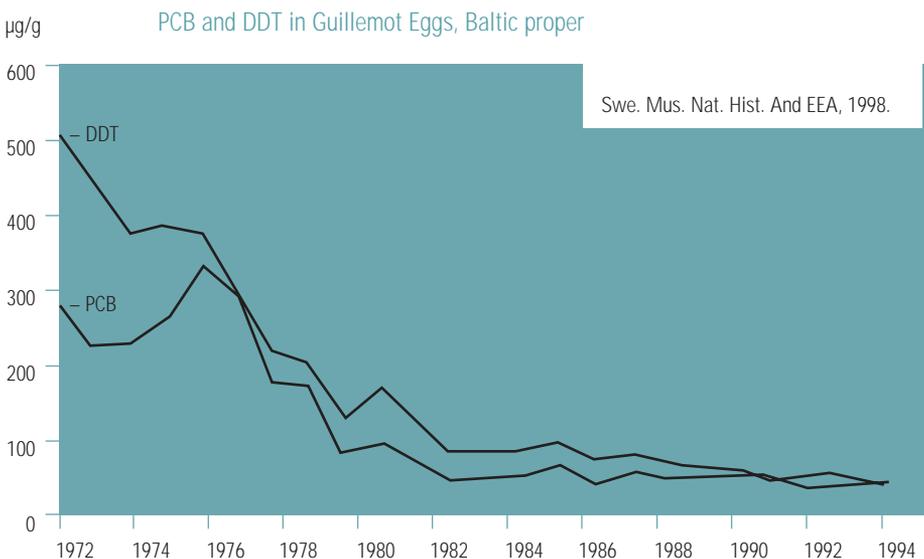
Society:

- Safer chemicals
- Access to information
- Less accumulation in Wildlife and humans
- Improved public health
- Less costly clean-ups
- Less sudden scandals

Industry:

- Consumer confidence
- Access to information
- Less liability cases
- Improved workers' health
- Simple, transparent and predictable legislation
- EU in front globally

After phase out





The Danish
Ecological Council
www.ecocouncil.dk



Danish Consumer
Council
www.fbr.dk



The Consumer
Council of Norway
www.forbrukerportalen.No



International Chemical
Secretariat in Sweden
www.chemsec.org



National Association for the
Protection
of the Icelandic Environment
www.landvernd.is



Finnish Association for
Nature Conservation
www.sll.fi

Nordic Environmental- and Consumer organisations have studied the concerns of Nordic industrial organisations. The Study shows that Nordic companies are generally neutral or even in favour of REACH. The report on the study highlights the major concerns and benefits both as seen from the industrial organisations' point of view, and as seen by environmental- and consumer organisations.

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Read the report:

REACH - a leap forward for industry
Nordic Concerns and Benefits



Order the report: info@ecocouncil.dk,
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Danish Ecological Council, Blegdamsvej 4 B, DK-2200 N.
The report is free, but postage and services are charged.
Download the report: www.ecocouncil.dk

More information on European chemicals policy:

European Commission on REACH:
www.Europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/chemicals/chempol/whitepaper/reach.htm
Campaign Website of European Environmental NGO's:
www.chemicalreaction.org
European Consumers' Organisation: www.beuc.org.
Information on chemicals in consumer products: www.chemical-cocktail.org
Detox-campaign by WWF: www.panda.org/toxics/
International Chemical Secretariat: www.chemsec.org

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