



PRESS RELEASE

Response to European Commission's position on chemical mixtures released today

(Communication on the combination effects of chemicals; chemicals mixtures – see Note 1)

Communication on chemical mixtures lacks urgency

Brussels, 31 May 2012 – Health environmental and consumer groups have expressed deep concern at today's Communication from the European Commission on people's exposure to mixtures of chemicals, the so-called "cocktail effect", especially as it relates to endocrine disrupting chemicals. (1)

"This Communication is a serious disappointment. It lacks any sense of urgency. Even though the Commission admits that it is not possible to do a proper assessment of the combination effects from different chemicals under the current structure of EU law, they are not proposing any changes to EU legislation," says Lisette van Vliet, Senior Policy Advisor, Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL).

In December 2009, the EU Environmental Ministers expressed concerns that the health of European citizens might not be properly protected from the combined effects of hazardous chemicals, particularly those that can disrupt hormones. They asked the Commission to produce a report on how existing EU legislation deals with risks from mixtures, saying that further action was required "to address combination effects of chemicals". (2)

An increasing number of scientific studies have suggested that endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), particularly in combination, play a role in both chronic diseases, including hormone related cancers (such as breast and testicular cancer), obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and also in reproductive problems, including low sperm counts and birth defects in baby boys, such as un-descended testes. (3)

"What is particularly worrying is that the foetus is being exposed to these chemicals – and foetal development is a uniquely sensitive developmental phase in human life. A recent study by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency showed that pregnant women have a number of different endocrine disrupting chemicals in their bodies,(4) and these EDCs are known to be capable of passing through the placenta," Ms. van Vliet says.

Daily, concurrent exposure to multiple chemicals, particularly endocrine disruptors, takes place through inhalation of pollutants in the air, absorption through the skin or ingestion through food and drink. (5)

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Notes for journalists

- (1) Communication from the Commission to the Council, The combination effect of chemicals, Chemical Mixtures, Brussels 31 May 2012.
Official Journal: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOIndex.do>
European Union Commission, DG Environment website on combination effects of Chemicals <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/effects.htm>
- (2) Council conclusions on combination effects of chemicals, 2988th ENVIRONMENT Council meeting, Brussels, 23 December 2009
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/homepage/showfocus?lang=en&focusID=65453>
- (3) Human exposures to EDCs may arise from various sources, including from consumer products, pesticides and other chemicals contaminating food. It is now known that many EDCs can act together in an additive way, and this increases the urgency of the need to eliminate public exposure whenever possible. In wildlife, adverse effects have also been seen on the reproductive health of male animals. For more information on assessment of the risks from mixtures, see report, "State of the Art of Mixtures Toxicology", by Andreas Kortenkamp, Thomas Backhaus, and Michael Faust, contracted by EU Commission DG Environment. See http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/pdf/report_Mixture%20toxicity.pdf

Amongst others, the study recommendations include:

1. That the EU should develop integrated guidelines addressing both human health and environmental concerns on the assessment of chemical mixtures;
2. That the legal mandate for mixtures risk assessment in the European Union should be strengthened;
3. That at the level of the EU, the concentration (dose) addition model should be applied as the default concept for mixture effects in the context of tiered assessment approaches.

In a Commission workshop on the results of the contracted study, the Chair concluded, amongst other things:

1. It is necessary and appropriate to address the issue of mixture effects as part of chemicals' risk assessment in the EU.
2. The assessment of mixture toxicity should be undertaken both in product oriented chemicals' legislation and media oriented environmental legislation.
3. We have sufficient information to develop technical guidelines for the assessment of mixture toxicity which could be applied across the different pieces of EU legislation. The legal form of such guidelines (Commission decision, recommendation etc) is to be decided.
4. As and when existing pieces of EU legislation dealing with chemicals are reviewed and revised, language should be introduced that allows mixture effects to be assessed and acted upon.

5. The review of REACH foreseen to be completed by 2012 presents an excellent opportunity for ensuring that the assessment of mixture toxicity is properly addressed in this key piece of legislation. It was recognised that the question of responsibility/liability is an important issue that would need to be tackled.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/pdf/Summary_Combination%20Effects.pdf

- (4) A recent study by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency showed pregnant women's exposure to multiple EDCs:

<http://www.mst.dk/English/About+the+Danish+EPA/News/20120328pregnant.htm>

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