

One of our big successes in recent years has been securing a good policy on chemicals, making sure they will be properly tested for safety and fully registered.

There are more than 100,000 different chemicals and any of them are potentially bad for our health and the environment. There are others about which we still know very little. Some can cause cancer, respiratory or hormonal problems, skin disorders for example. We are all exposed to hundreds of chemicals in our daily lives and an awareness campaign launched by NGOs demonstrated that our blood can contain an average of 41 potentially harmful chemicals.

Our aim is to remove the most dangerous chemicals and replace them with safer alternatives. Remember that asbestos was widely used in fire prevention before it was scientifically established just how dangerous it is. The Socialist Group is strongly behind building the world's most ambitious system for managing safer chemical use. Thanks to the efforts of the European Union and socialist MEPs, some of the most toxic substances for example, the phthalates that were previously used in toy manufacture, have now been banned.

You may have heard of the proposals for a new system called REACH.

# REACH

A SAFE CHEMICALS  
POLICY



 **PSE**

Socialist Group in the  
European Parliament

What is REACH? It is an acronym for the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals. It involves establishing a system that will make it possible to find out about the risks related to chemicals produced in or imported into the European Union. The European Union already has a test and risk assessment system run by the official authorities and covering only chemicals placed on the market since 1981. This system is notoriously ineffective and we think that despite some achievements, it lacks ambition.

Too little has been achieved in the evaluation of chemicals. The current test system is far too slow and the burden of the proof should be transferred from public authorities to producers because they are best placed to undertake proper risk assessments. The chemicals industry complained that the costs of any new system would be too high and would lead to job losses. Socialists in the European Parliament worked hard to make sure that the system would be workable for industry whilst at the same time being efficient enough to achieve the key goal of managing chemicals – improving our knowledge, banning the most dangerous and developing safer alternatives.

Under this new REACH system, producers will have to register their chemicals and gather data about their properties. Public authorities will evaluate the industry's testing proposals. They may request further information on products deemed to be potentially dangerous. When a substance appears to be of very high risk, the industry will need to request special authorisation to produce it. This authorisation will only be granted under very strict conditions. Producers will have to prove that the risks are closely controlled.

For up to date information about our activities, please visit our website

[www.socialistgroup.eu](http://www.socialistgroup.eu)

# STAGES IN REACHING A SAFE CHEMICALS POLICY

# REACH

1998

**April** / At the informal Environmental Council meeting in the UK, Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden submit a document outlining the need for a completely new policy on chemicals.

1999

**June** / The Environmental Council takes a step towards a fundamental review of the EU chemicals policy by giving a clear mandate to the European Commission.

2001

**February** / The Commission publishes its White Paper 'Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy' presenting the changes needed.



2003

**Spring – early summer** / The European Commission publishes parts of its draft legislation for an eight week public consultation. There are more than 6,000 reactions, and the draft legislation is changed to take out safety information requirements for more than 20,000 chemicals.

The Commission then presents its final proposal, alongside the External Impact Assessment on REACH. The proposal aims to get safety data for 30,000 of the 100,000 chemicals available on the EU market, leaving two thirds with relatively little data, making them harder to classify.

In **October**, the Socialist Group's rapporteur, Guido Sacconi, presents his report on REACH to Parliament, but there is no vote due to delaying tactics by conservative parliamentarians. Discussions are put on hold until after the European elections.

At this time national experts begin an analysis of the proposal to develop a council position on REACH, due to end by December 2005.

2004

Employer and industry organisations begin more impact assessments of REACH. In the same year, an EU presidency workshop analyses 36 impact assessments and concludes that new legislation will have limited costs for business whilst bringing benefits for health and the environment.

Following the European Parliament elections in June, discussions re-start in Committee.

2005

**April** / The industry study finds REACH will not lead to withdrawal of important chemicals from the market and concludes REACH is not bad for business.

**November** / Parliament votes to phase out the most hazardous chemicals and in December the Council of Ministers agrees the common position.

2006

**July** / Common position submitted to the Parliament.

**September** / EP discussions on the second reading began.

**November-December** / Council, the Parliament and the Commission negotiators reach an agreement which is approved by Parliament then by EU Environment ministers so REACH is adopted. It becomes law at the end of December.

2007

**June**  
REACH enters into force in all 27 Member States



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