



Joint press release – 1st December 2006

REACH, a deal too far

December 1st 2006, Brussels – European environmental, women's, health and consumer groups today denounced a deal struck behind closed doors between representatives of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers on the 'REACH' chemicals legislation. If adopted at the plenary vote, the deal will allow many chemicals of very high concern - including many that cause cancer, birth defects and other serious illnesses - to stay on the market and be used in consumer products even when safer alternatives are available. The groups call on Parliamentarians to strengthen REACH when they vote on the proposal in mid-December.

Last night, Parliament negotiators accepted a deal based on cosmetic changes to the Council's flawed approach of 'adequate control'. This approach, championed by the chemicals industry, is founded on the claim that our exposure to hazardous chemicals can be controlled so as to pose no danger to human health and the environment. This claim has been refuted by numerous studies showing that hazardous industrial chemicals used in consumer products are widespread in house dust, rainwater, wildlife, in our own blood and that of unborn infants.

The deal confirms the Council's position of last December that substitution would apply to persistent and bioaccumulative chemicals. It also allows the public to request information about the presence of a limited number of hazardous chemicals in products.

The groups call on Members of the European Parliament to close the loopholes that will allow chemical companies to continue using very hazardous substances even where safer alternatives are available. The decision that substitution plans will only be submitted when the applicant company itself identifies a safer alternative is an incentive for chemical companies to continue ignoring safer alternatives.

REACH was originally conceived to close the knowledge gap on chemicals and establish an effective and coherent system for chemicals management. However, with thousands of chemicals already exempted from the requirement to provide any health and safety information, and with no systematic substitution for chemicals of very high concern, this overly compromised REACH will provide no real improvement to the current legislation. Besides a missed opportunity for Europe to take the lead in safer chemicals, a REACH that fails to protect human health and the environment will only further decrease public trust in the chemical industry and in European regulators.

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