



Welcome speech at the ANEC/ASI-CC/BEUC conference “How to eliminate hazardous chemicals from consumer products”

by Benedicte Federspiel, member of ANEC, BEUC and the EESC

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a member of the Economic and Social Committee, I am pleased to welcome you to this landmark conference on hazardous chemicals in consumer products, co-hosted by ANEC, the European Consumer Voice in Standardisation, BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation and the Consumer Council of the Austrian Standards Institute. I am all the more delighted to welcome you as a past President of both ANEC and BEUC.

Through this conference, we would like to engage with all of you in an open and constructive dialogue about chemicals in consumer products and how to close the gaps in the present European legislation.

Tests by consumer magazines often show that the vast bulk of consumer products available on the European market today contain potentially hazardous chemicals: food storage boxes contain bisphenol A; toys contain phthalates; cosmetic products contain parabens, computers contain brominated flame retardants and so forth.

Unfortunately, many of these chemicals accumulate in the fatty tissue of the body or do not break down or degrade easily. Of particular concern are those chemicals known to be toxic, cause cancer, damage our reproductive systems or adversely affect the hormonal system. There are increasing concerns from scientists about the potential “cocktail effect” of chemicals, whereby combined exposure to hazardous chemicals may have a detrimental impact on our health significantly higher than the effect of single substances. And this is probably just the tip of the iceberg considering that most chemicals used today haven't been tested with regard to their potential risks to health and the environment.

Hazardous chemicals are not only present in consumer products but can be found in the dust of our homes, in the air, in the water and soil as well as in our bodies, notably our blood and breast milk. Hence our organizations believe it both urgent and essential to work towards reducing exposure based on the precautionary principle.

And it is possible to substitute many of the potentially dangerous chemicals. Consumer organisations in several countries, including my own organisation the Danish Consumer Council, have launched campaigns for banning endocrine disrupting chemicals such as parabens in cosmetics. In Denmark, the largest retail chain COOP, the largest drugstore chain, Matas, and all the pharmacies have phased out different EDCs in their own brands in response to our concerns. When it comes to international companies however, there is still a long way to go – no EDCs have been phased out.



It seems as if industry is sitting on their hands waiting for regulation, and if they do not sit on their hands they are actively fighting regulation. Industry needs to look at the lessons learned from the past, where early warnings about dangerous chemicals were ignored. What about the current discussion about Bisphenol A in food containers? BPA has been phased out in baby bottles but what are we waiting for before banning it in every food contact materials? No later than last week, the French Food Safety Authority itself called for a total ban of the use of BPA based on two recent alarming studies. As we see it, the mounting evidence of a cocktail effect is an early warning we all have to listen to and industry and regulators must react upon.

The lack of voluntary substitution of dangerous chemicals from industry worries us. But we also have very serious concerns about how the EU assesses and regulates chemicals contained in consumer products. Legal provisions exist for many different product groups such as toys, cosmetics and food contact materials but they are often vague or insufficient to ensure a high level of protection for consumers. There are huge gaps in the European legislative framework and no coherent approach. And industry is not helped in reducing the risks to health and the environment through such a piecemeal approach.

In 2006, the REACH legislation was adopted to regulate chemicals on the EU market. Unfortunately, we are still a long way from seeing chemicals being systematically assessed for their effects on health and the environment, and even further from seeing a decrease in the use of hazardous chemicals in consumer products.

This is why ANEC, ASI-CC and BEUC have decided to join forces and launch a European-wide debate on chemicals in consumer products.

This conference aims to:

- show the gaps in the European legislative framework with regard to the use of hazardous chemicals in consumer products
- discuss how to adapt this legislation to protect consumers properly
- discuss the role of industry in substituting hazardous chemicals
- consider the need for an integrated horizontal approach to deal with chemicals in consumer products

We look forward to an interesting debate!

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