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ANEC Statement

Nanomaterials: a very small step on the long and bumpy road to consumer safety

After almost 12 months of waiting, ANEC welcomes the adoption of a regulatory definition of nanomaterials by the European Commission, albeit with mixed feelings. We welcome application of the approach according to which the size distribution of a material should be based on the number concentration (i.e. the number of particles), and not on the mass concentration of a nanomaterial product. This is because a small mass concentration may contain the largest number fraction¹.

However, we are dismayed that the 1% threshold of the particle number size distribution, as recommended by the many scientific opinions², was abandoned in favour of a 50% threshold, despite a lack of scientific justification. We understand the change was made to reflect opposition expressed during the public consultation phase to the lower threshold, especially from industry.

ANEC Secretary-General, Stephen Russell, added: "Although we welcome the possibility for this threshold to be lowered where warranted by concerns for the environment, health & safety, in practice, we fear a large number of products will escape regulation, and nano-specific risk assessment, as it will be very difficult to determine whether they are unsafe in a given concentration. The same is true for the 100 nm upper limit in the definition, which will allow bigger nano-particles to be used in consumer products without any nano-specific risk assessment. Bearing in mind that products claiming to contain nanomaterials are already widely available for consumers on the European market³, we call on the European Institutions, who will use this definition, to adhere to the precautionary principle and to ensure the highest levels of consumer protection practicable in their regulation of the nanotechnologies and nanomaterials".

END

¹ <http://www.anec.eu/attachments/ANEC-PR-2011-PRL-008.pdf>

² http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/emerging/docs/scenihr_o_032.pdf

³ <http://www.anec.eu/attachments/ANEC-PT-2010-Nano-017.xls>