



April 21st, 2005

Dear Member of Parliament,

Re: Women's organisations supporting the REACH proposal from the European Commission

Women in Europe are concerned about chemicals. We are concerned about the chemicals that we are exposed to everywhere, every day, without our knowledge: in the shower, in front of the computer, in the kitchen and in the workplace. These chemicals are polluting our air, rivers, seas and wildlife. To date, up to 300 man-made chemicals have been detected in the human body alone. These chemicals are passed on by each generation, directly from mother to child. Alarmingly, of the 100.000 chemicals on the European market, only 14% have ever been tested for their health and environment effects. This is an unacceptable information gap.

Women, men and children are susceptible and exposed to chemicals in different ways. Biological factors are one reason for the different vulnerability of women with respect to synthetic chemicals. However, social factors are also influential when it comes to women's exposure to man-made chemicals and pollutants. For example, there is a direct link between prevailing traditional gender roles and exposure to chemicals in household and cleaning products, cosmetics and personal care products.

Some synthetic chemicals start to harm the developing child in its prenatal phase, where they can damage the brain and the nervous system. Recent reports have also stated that health effects in children only become visible once the child has reached puberty or adulthood. Many substances are considered *chemicals of very high concern* because they accumulate in the body and cannot break down; they are toxic, disrupt the hormone system, cause cancer or are able to alter our DNA. Of those chemicals where there is research available, a variety of negative health effects have been observed ranging from learning disabilities, asthma and allergies to infertility and cancer.

How can we purchase safe products, when we have little or no information about them? How can we protect our health and that of our children if hazardous chemicals can be found in many consumer products? We have a right to know which kind of dangers we expose ourselves and our families to and we believe it is your responsibility as an elected member of the European Parliament and that of other European institutions to protect us from the negative health and environment effects of synthetic chemicals.

The European Commission's proposal for the REACH regulation presents an excellent opportunity for Europe to take leadership to ensure that the regulation will fulfil its objectives and provides high-level protection for European women, their families and the environment.

We, therefore, urge you to support the draft REACH regulation proposal from the Commission with the following vital amendments:

- **Authorisation for the use** of chemicals of very high concern must be more **stringent, time - limited** and lead to the **mandatory substitution** of these substances;
- **Hazard evaluation** of chemicals must also be **based on their effects on foetal development and the health of women and children**;
- In order to close the existing gap on safety information on chemicals, **registration procedures for production volumes of 1-10t must be strengthened**;
- Consumers, retailers and downstream users must have **full access to information** relating to chemicals and their risks to health and safety;
- **Dangerous substances in consumer products**, which are subject to authorisation must be **clearly labelled**;
- Substances used in **imported products must be subject to the same information requirements** as products made in the EU.

We trust that it is a priority for you to ensure the protection of human health and hope that you will actively support those amendments during the upcoming discussions and votes on the REACH regulation in the European Parliament. Your action will ensure a future-oriented European chemicals policy, which places precautionary action at the forefront, and includes the substitution of the most dangerous chemicals as the most effective long-term measure in the management of chemicals. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Marie Kranendonk

Women in Europe for a Common Future



Helen Lynn

Women's Environment Network



Barbara Gill

Women's Institute

COPY:

UK Spokesperson for environment (labour, conservative, liberal)

UK Spokesperson for women (labour, conservative, liberal)

UK Spokesperson for industry and trade (labour, conservative, liberal)