



Towards a swift adaptation of research and health policies to endocrine disrupters (EDCs): exploring solutions and good practices

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Public health, research, endocrine disrupters, vulnerable populations

On April 10th, a roundtable organized by WECF France gathered senior scientists, public authorities and civil society representatives to discuss “Endocrine disrupters (EDCs): impacts and mechanisms of action from conception to maturity”. Beyond the general scientific assessment of EDCs adverse health effects, the event has been an opportunity to explore solutions towards new public health and research policies, adequate to the EDCs challenge.

First priority: Defining EDCs criteria and develop new research methodologies

Developing criteria to identify EDCs has been the main task of European Union and its member States for months. Adequate criteria are key for future of EU EDCs policies, as explained Gwynne Lyons, Director of the UK Charity CHEM Trust, reminding of the valuable contribution by ANSES (French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health Safety) on Bisphenol A (BPA) assessment, especially on the specific issue of EDCs criteria relevant for humans. Complementary and equally critical to the criteria is the development of new testing methodologies at EFSA or OCDE level which take into account the complexity and specific patterns of EDCs.

« A new OECD take years to agree, for the foreseeable future, non-OECD studies must also be able to impact on chemicals assessment. ANSES has a leadership role to play, in that their assessment of BPA was exemplary in setting out how to apply collective expert judgment about the reliability and relevance of independent studies ». Gwynne Lyons, Director of CHEM Trust

Swift action is needed to protect the health of populations from EDCs

Just as underlined by the representatives of both public authorities and NGOs, EDCs has been on the agenda long enough to trigger action right now. The current Danish Presidency of the European Union has made EDCs and combination effects one of its priorities, and Denmark, is among the most active EU member states on EDCs: in 2010, Denmark banned 2 parabens from use in baby cosmetics, whereas France implemented a BPA ban in baby bottles, several months before EU official ban. Banning certain EDCs in products for use by babies, infants and pregnant women indicate the importance of taking action and protect the most vulnerable members of our societies. These measures pave the way for a general protection of those populations as well as a coherent and global approach to EDCs in all EU sectorial regulations, as underlined by MEP Michèle Rivasi.

"The EU Strategy on EDCs was elaborated in 1999, but where do we stand now? The process is slow and as of today on the 46 substances identified as SVHC (substances of very high concern) under REACH so-called "candidate list", only one of them, octylphenol, has been listed because of its endocrine properties. The European Commission should ensure a faster process by using a generally agreed approach to identify these substances. The candidate list should be updated to reflect proposed models for action such as the SIN (Substitute It Now) List elaborated by NGOs (under the leadership ChemSec), Michèle Rivasi, Member of European Parliament.

Precaution and prevention measures on EDCs in practice

The SIN list, initiated in 2008 by the Swedish NGO ChemSec (Chemical Secretariat) together with a coalition of European NGOs, now amounts to a total of 378 substances fulfilling SVHC criteria under REACH. In May 2011, the SIN list was updated to enclose 22 new EDCs substances. To date, the SIN list approach is welcome by stakeholders such as industry and insurance companies and used as a tool for prioritize action on EDCs of high concern.

"There is no need to wait for EDC criteria in order to identify and act on high concern EDCs. Identification of EDCs can be done on a case-by-case basis and the SIN List shows one way to start" Anna Lennquist, ChemSec.

Press contact:

Elisabeth Ruffinengo, advocacy officer WECF

elisabeth.ruffinengo@wecf.eu

Tél : +33 (0)4 50 49 97 38 / + 33 (0)6 74 77 77 00

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