

European Commission Initiatives on Endocrine Disrupters

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In October 1998 the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on Endocrine Disrupters. In its Resolution, the Parliament calls upon the Commission to take specific actions in particular with a view to improve the legislative framework, to reinforce research efforts and to make information available to the public.

In 1999, the Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (SCTEE) issued an opinion on human and wildlife effects on endocrine disrupting chemicals and identified a potential global problem for wildlife. It states that impaired reproduction and development causally linked to endocrine disrupting chemicals are well documented in a number of wildlife species and have caused local and population change.

Public policy makers urgently need to address this issue, therefore the Commission adopted a “Communication on a Community Strategy for Endocrine Disrupters” -COM(1999)706- which has been implemented in 2001 -COM(2001) 262-.

This strategy is based on three groups of actions, to be implemented at short, medium and long-term:

Short-term actions

The majority of short-term actions focused on the need to gather up-to-date information about the science of endocrine disruption, the extent to which it was affecting people and wildlife, and identification of substances for further evaluation of their role in endocrine disruption. A first report has been published in 2000 and actually two other studies are under development.

Focus has been put on the communication to the public, with a new endocrine disrupter website that will be available early 2003, and on gathering of information concerning different initiatives on ED, for which a study has been launched for identify the different initiatives in this area at the Member States and in other countries/organizations in the world. The European Commission also participates and organizes different symposiums and workshops.

Medium-term actions

As part of the medium-term actions, the Commission is committed to support the process of development and validation of test methods by working closely with Member States to coordinate the European Union input at OECD and focus on research development, under the different Community Framework Programs for Research and Technological Development.

Under the 4th framework program (1994-1998), endocrine disruption was recognized as a research priority and approximately €18M funding was provided on this program. Projects included the development of test methods, biomonitoring and the study of ecological and human health effects.

At the 5th framework program (1998-2002) most of the projects have focused on the effect of estrogenic compounds on the human reproductive system, but other compounds and end points were also under investigation. Other areas included, the study of the ecotoxicological impact of possible endocrine substances in freshwater and marine ecosystems as well as the establishment of the CREDO cluster (the Cluster of Research into Endocrine Disruption in Europe), which includes a group of projects addressing ED issues.

Endocrine Disruption in the 6th framework program (2003-2006), will be covered under the

Thematic Priorities 5 “Food Quality and Safety”, Subarea: Environmental Health Risks, and the Priority 6 “Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems.

Long-term actions

Includes the review and adaptation of existing laws and legislation, governing the testing, assessment and use of chemicals and substances within the EU. It is predicted that this will take 4 years or more to achieve.

Measures have been taken by the European Commission, concerning the adaptation/amendments of current legislation in order to deal with the ED problem. Those legislative actions included for example, the adopted Directive 1999/51/EC relating to provisions on tributyltin (TBT). It is also foreseen to produce proposals on the Water Framework Directive (Dir 2000/60/EC) and the Drinking Water Directive (Dir 98/83/EC). Regarding Dir 91/414/EEC on the placing of Plant Protection Products on the market the revision of the annexes is currently in progress.

On 13 February 2001, the Commission adopted a White paper on a strategy for a future chemicals policy, known as REACH system (For registration, evaluation and authorization of chemicals). One of the key elements of the proposed strategy is an Authorisation procedure for substances of very high concern –CMR (carcinogenic, mutagenic and toxic to reproduction) and substances with POPs characteristics. The procedure would require authorities to give specific permission before such a substance could be used for a particular purpose, marketed as such or as a component of a product, and given that many of the health effects associated with endocrine disrupting chemicals are CMR effects, it is likely that many of endocrine disrupting chemicals will fall under this authorisation procedure.

Regarding the initiatives taken by the Member States on regulation, monitoring, research and development: Denmark, for example, banned the use of phthalates in certain types of toys intended for children below the age of three years. Other Member States developed risk assessments (i.e. nonylphenol and bisphenol A) and/or are actively involved on different monitoring and/or research programs with the aim of studying the wildlife and human health effects of the potential exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals.