

PRESS RELEASE

REACH – New EU Chemical Policy – Downstream Users Voice Their Continuing Concerns.

On Tuesday February 17th downstream users of chemical products, united in the CheMI platform, organised a Conference devoted to the impact of the Commission's proposal for a new regulatory framework for chemicals, also known as REACH (registration, evaluation, authorisation of chemicals). That this Conference filled a gap was proven by the fact that it brought together more than 130 representatives of numerous chemical product using industries, representatives of member-states, of the European Parliament, and the European Commission.

The Commission proposal, which was adopted on October 29th 2003, is now making its way through the co-decision procedure of Council and Parliament. It has given further rise to serious concern on the part of producers and users of chemicals alike, ever since the Chemicals White Paper on which REACH is based was published in the year 2001.

At the conference officials from DG Enterprise and DG Environment explained that the modifications which had been incorporated into the October 2003 proposal aimed at simplifying the system and reducing its cost impact upon companies in the European Union. They felt in addition that the proposal provided a level playing field with foreign competitors, whilst offering opportunities for innovation and still retaining the overall environmental benefits which the Commission had estimated to reach up to €50 billion.

Downstream users in return voiced serious concern about the cost, competition and employment elements of the proposal. They considered these to have been substantially underestimated or inadequately addressed by the Commission. It was expected that the proposal would lead to an enormous administrative and financial burden. On top of these extra costs were expected if producers of chemicals would decide to no longer market certain – mainly low volume – chemicals if the extra investments required by REACH would prove to be unprofitable. The latter development would lead to the unacceptable situation that industry would be faced with extra costs which are not related to the goals of the proposal, in other words, which would not make Europe a safer place. Many speakers specifically addressed this issue, and it was clearly demonstrated that due to the complexity of many chemical preparations, even small changes in formulation would have serious consequences. This aspect of REACH could even threaten the future of certain industries especially those where SMEs predominate.

Other downstream users stressed that the issue of substances in articles appeared not to have been adequately addressed, which raised additional concerns in respect of compliance with REACH of semi-manufactures or final articles imported into the EU.

Representing the European manufacturers of tyres and rubber products, BLIC was pleased that the Commission accepted the invitation to enter a dialogue with a large number of downstream users present at the Conference. However, the Association regretted that the competition concerns were “played down” by the Commission representatives and would urge that the proposal be amended in order to ensure a global level playing field

Bill Lakin of Euratex, who chaired the event stated: “I believe that all those who attended were pleased that the EU Commission was prepared to send representatives to the Conference who discussed openly and frankly with us their position on REACH. I do have to say however that at the end of the day they had not convinced participants that REACH did not pose a serious cost and competition problem for their industries. The CheMI platform, which unites the down stream users of chemical products, will therefore continue its actions at Parliament and Council level to convince them of the need for some necessary improvements to the current proposals, to achieve the goals set out by the Commission, without the current financial and administrative burden for industry. ”

For further information contact the respective CheMI members¹. The proceedings of the conference can be downloaded from the following websites: www.euratex.org (publications / others) and www.flexpack-europe.org.

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