

Safe chemicals for our common future

With the Green Deal, the European Commission has committed to carbon neutrality and a zero-pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment. To achieve this, we call on the Commission to develop an ambitious long-term chemicals strategy that will protect present and future generations from harm caused by hazardous chemicals and enable a sustainable toxic-free circular economy.

It is high time we put an end to the common misconception that the protection of health and the environment hinders innovation and a competitive economy. Considering that a global health crisis caused the largest global recession in decades, then surely the path to sustainable prosperity, innovation and competitiveness requires a green transition to a toxic-free circular economy for a healthy planet and healthy people.

For our recovery plans to be sustainable in the long-term, they need to include actions to prevent harmful effects of chemicals on human and animal health and the environment.

As the world's second largest manufacturing industry, the chemicals industry plays a major role in our modern society and provides many benefits. This role is likely to grow even further; according to the OECD, chemicals production, use and trade are expected to more than double by 2050.

Hazardous chemicals cause significant environmental damage, for instance to pollinators, birds and fish. They also cause serious health conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases and decreased immune response to vaccines. Endocrine disruptors – one single category of hazardous chemicals – have been conservatively estimated to cost the European health system €160 billion per year¹.

While much progress has been made in identifying the risks of chemicals, harmful effects on human health and the environment remain. A long-term plan for the sustainable management of chemicals at EU and global level is imperative.

We call on the Commission to maintain its high level of ambition and deliver a green and long-term chemicals strategy for sustainability including concrete actions and milestones. The strategy should have clear links to other cross-cutting agendas such as climate, biodiversity, circular economy and industry. Our [ambition](#) will protect human health and the environment, while boosting innovation and competitiveness. It will also contribute to tackling biodiversity loss and pollution, and facilitate the transition to a circular economy, which is crucial in our fight against climate change.

We therefore call on the Commission to take into account the following key points:

First, the Commission should accelerate the substitution and phase-out of chemicals of concern, including imports of products made with such chemicals that are banned in the EU. Chemicals of concern should only be allowed when their use is considered essential for society.

Second, the Commission's strategy should contain measures to drive industry towards the development of safe-by-design chemicals.

Third, the Commission should propose streamlining the legislation regarding chemicals, products and waste to ensure a well-functioning circular economy with safe chemicals, high-quality and non-toxic secondary raw materials and sustainable products.

¹ Trasande et al. (2015). Estimating Burden and Disease Costs of Exposure to Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals in the European Union. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jcem/article/100/4/1245/2815065>

Fourth, the Commission should continuously develop the EU chemicals policy to address existing and emerging issues of concern such as endocrine disruptors, combination effects and persistent fluorinated substances (PFAS).

Finally, the highest human health and environmental standards should be promoted at the international level.

Almost 20 years ago, in 2001, the Commission published a White Paper that led to the development of the most advanced chemicals regulations in the world. Now the regulatory framework needs to be strengthened further to address challenges posed by hazardous chemicals and climate change. As Member States, we are committed to continuing to take initiatives to limit the use of hazardous chemicals. In September this year, we expect to see the Commission give a renewed impetus to the European chemicals legislation and blaze the trail to a toxic-free environment for generations to come.

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