

REACHforLIFE Press Release



REACHforLIFE Roundtable Highlights Importance of Risk Assessments

Brussels, 24 February 2009: Yesterday the REACHforLIFE campaign hosted its first roundtable in Brussels entitled "On the fringes or centre stage: where do risk assessments sit within EU public policy?" The roundtable brought together a cross-section of relevant stakeholders, opinion-formers, and decision-makers to hold an open discussion on the role of science and scientific risk assessments in EU policy.

"The purpose of the REACHforLIFE roundtables is to push this issue up the EU agenda and highlight to decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public at large that official EU risk assessments should be respected," said REACHforLIFE spokesman Willem Hofland. "Risk assessments are a costly necessity, and ignoring their conclusions equates to a waste of both time and public money – something we can all ill-afford in the current climate."

This was the first of four roundtables which REACHforLIFE is hosting in Brussels in the first half of this year and follows on from the campaign's successful launch event which took place in September 2008. In the interest of having a balanced debate we had also invited a number of representatives from environmental NGOs, but none of those invited accepted our invitation.

Joel Hasse Ferreira MEP, who was guest of honour at the Roundtable and sits on the board of the Science and Technology Assessment Options Panel (STOA) in the European Parliament, emphasised that risk assessments should be accessible and comprehensible for decision makers. "The European Parliament has excellent legal support and also we have economic support," he said. "However, it is difficult for several MEPs to address the detail on technical issues, unless we are integrated in specialized structures like the STOA Panel".

Examples of due process being ignored are the publication and promotion by certain parties of many black lists of chemicals which are not always coherent one with another. These tactics are clear attempts to pre-empt the results of the REACH Regulation, even before the process has properly begun, while most of the data requested to assess those substances has not even been gathered.

Dr Leonor Sierra, Scientific Liaison at the organisation Sense About Science, representing the scientific side of the debate, argued that decision-makers should take a more proactive role when presented with any form of scientific evidence. "Even if decision-makers are not experts, they can still ask questions and query the status of scientific evidence," she said. "Is the study peer reviewed? Is it published in a recognised journal? Is the sample representative?"

Phil Newton, Senior Manager for Public Relations at the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA), who also participated in the roundtable, used the example of the European Parliament's

adoption of the new pesticide Regulation in mid-January as an example of the failure to take into account risk assessments, criticising “the lack of a scientific reference point in EU legislation.”

A full report of the roundtable will be made available in due course. The next REACHforLIFE roundtable - “What do consumers have to gain from science-based policy-making?” - will be held in Brussels on Thursday 19 March. Anyone interested in attending, either as a participant or an observer, is welcome to contact the REACHforLIFE Press Office.

For more information please contact the REACHforLIFE press office, pressoffice@reachforlife.eu or on +32(0)2.213.49.59.

About REACHforLIFE

The objective of REACHforLIFE is to launch a debate, the aim of which is to move away from blanket mistrust of chemicals and towards a balanced approach in applying sound scientific evidence when approving for use chemical substances that are critical for our lives. In particular it is calling for the EU’s comprehensive legislative infrastructure for chemicals, of which risk assessments and REACH form an integral part, to be trusted and upheld.

Our campaign is pan-European, embracing the Brussels regulatory landscape and the EU Member States, particularly France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK.

REACHforLIFE was founded in June 2008 and currently comprises the companies Albemarle, Chemtura, and ICL-IP.

REACHforLIFE is interested in linking up with other sectors who feel that they are being unjustly targeted without reference to due scientific and legislative process and welcomes any enquiries to this effect - www.reachforlife.eu.
