

Session 5 – Exploring Options to Address the Challenges

With a view to identify ideas for a Danish input to the EU Strategy towards a Non-Toxic Environment, The Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark has asked the Danish Chemicals Forum to formulate four themes to be discussed at the workshop. The four themes are:

1. Endocrine Disruptors
2. Chemical Mixtures
3. Substances in articles and imported products
4. Processing contaminants in the food industry

General introduction about the Chemicals Forum

The Chemicals Forum includes all stakeholders in the chemicals area in Denmark - the business community, consumers, NGOs, employers, research institutes and environmental authorities, occupational safety and health (OSH) authorities, and health authorities. The Chemicals Forum was established in 2014 by the Danish Minister for the Environment with the object of ensuring knowledge-sharing, dialogue and co-operation in the chemicals area. The Chemicals Forum considers that common targets and guidelines for EU work in the chemicals area are necessary and fundamental for sustainable growth and stronger competition as well as improvements in the environment, OSH and health.

1. Endocrine disruptors

Challenges

- The “Community Strategy for Endocrine Disruptors” from 1999 already identified endocrine disruptors (EDs) as a concern for human health and the environment. This is especially true for sensitive and vulnerable risk groups (pregnant women and children). New scientific knowledge has added to this concern.
- Part of the strategy for a non-toxic environment as required in the 7th EAP by 2018 builds on horizontal measures to minimise exposure to ED’s which should have been in place by 2015.
- Scientific criteria for the identification of ED’s are currently being introduced in pesticides and biocides legislation.

2. Chemical mixtures

Challenges

- The 7th EAP requires that horizontal legislation such as REACH, the Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulations, as well as legislation on biocidal products and plant protection products, provides baseline protection for human health and the environment and ensures stability and predictability for economic operators.
- We know the combined effects of different chemicals (mixtures) can have adverse effects on human health and the environment but that it is difficult to address from scientific, testing and legislative perspectives.
- Today, chemicals are assessed individually using a substance-by-substance approach. Therefore, there is a need to further develop and implement approaches to address combination effects of chemicals in all relevant Union legislation and to set out a comprehensive approach to minimising exposure to hazardous substances, including chemicals in products.
- There is still also uncertainty about impacts on human health from the total exposure effects of the same chemical but from different sources, e.g. food, personal care, consumer products (total exposure or aggregate exposure from both food and the environment).

3. Substances in articles and imported products

Challenges

- The 7th Environment Action Programme (7th EAP) , the European Commission Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe and the Commission Communication “Towards a circular economy” and Circular Economy Package from December 2015 set the basis for our joint efforts on contributing to the EU “Green Growth” agenda, inter alia, by delivering decent jobs and sustainably stimulating growth for the European citizens.
- However, with the present REACH requirements, substances of concern may still enter the EU via imported articles even when all EU uses have been phased-out. This causes health and environmental concern as well as competitive disadvantages for European industry. The legislation is also deficient with respect to information on hazardous substances in articles which amongst other concerns may hamper environmentally sound reuse and recycling.
- Articles, such as textiles, may contain many different hazardous substances that together may cause risks to consumers and workers, including sensitive groups such as children or the environment and working environment.

4. Processing contaminants in the food industry

Challenges

- The European Union has agreed to achieve, by 2020, the objective that chemicals are produced and used in ways that lead to the minimisation of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.
- Many chemical contaminants are formed e.g. during the combustion of fuel in smoking and the direct drying process of foodstuffs, within the food by heat treatment (e.g. acrylamide), by use of chemicals in food processing and by disinfection of process equipment with biocides. These are substances of concern and can pose a health risk to consumers, workers and the environment.