

## Press Release

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**Date:** 14/10/2020  
**Reference:** BEUC-PR-2020-035

### **Consumers place high hopes on EU gearing up fight against harmful chemicals**

The EU has announced concrete steps to better protect consumers against harmful chemicals – to which they are exposed night and day from multiple sources. That is the gist of the long-awaited Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, published today by the EU Commission. The European Consumer Organisation BEUC, who has long been calling on the EU to tighten its grip on chemicals, judges the blueprint promising and urges the Commission to now follow through. The EU last updated its strategy for chemicals policy in 2001.<sup>1</sup>

Today, most chemicals can be used in consumer products with little actual control. BEUC members – national consumer organisations – frequently detect chemicals of concern such as endocrine disruptors in products ranging from clothes and toys to cosmetics and food packaging. Although consumers are kept in the dark on which chemicals are in their products and how to reduce exposure, they are increasingly concerned.<sup>2</sup>

An abundance of studies link our chemical exposure to the rise of chronic and severe diseases such as cancer, infertility, and allergies.<sup>3</sup> Evidence suggests that people suffering from chronic diseases as well as autoimmune and respiratory diseases are at increased risk from COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Monique Goyens, BEUC Director General, has commented:**

“It is no secret that the current chemical rules are inadequate and leave consumers [exposed](#) to harmful chemicals from dawn to dusk. Last time the EU set a long-term vision for its chemicals policy was almost 20 years ago, so today’s announcement is a generational opportunity which we urge the EU to fully seize. The plan is promising, now we want the EU to walk their talk and ensure that loopholes such as on endocrine disruptors in cosmetics, toys and food packaging are closed without delay.

“Those who have chronic diseases such as asthma are at increased risk from COVID-19. As the role chemicals play in such illnesses becomes increasingly clear and pandemics are likely to recur, it is crucial to minimise our cumulative exposures to harmful chemicals now. This strategy is a real chance to tackle the problem head-on.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2001 [Strategy for a future Chemicals Policy](#) laid the ground for REACH, the overarching chemicals EU legislation.

<sup>2</sup> 84 percent of Europeans reported concerns about chemicals in everyday products, up from 43 percent in 2014, in [Special Eurobarometer 468 ‘Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment’](#), 2017.

<sup>3</sup> European Environmental Agency, [Healthy environment, healthy lives](#), 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Sharon Lerner, [Scientists pin blame for some coronavirus deaths on air pollution, PFAs, and other chemicals](#), in The Intercept, 26 June 2020.



“Making stricter rules is urgently needed, but they must also be applied. Today, enforcement of the chemicals rules is too often weak and patchy. Consumer groups keep finding dangerous chemicals in products where they are not supposed to be.

“We couldn’t agree more with the Commission’s zero-tolerance stance on companies breaking the chemicals rules. With imported products being of particular concern, this strict approach should also be reflected in EU trade deals. To ensure the upcoming strict measures do not end up as toothless tigers, Member States must step up the controls too.”

## For background

The strategy aims to:

- **Have companies rely on safer alternatives, including those which already exist.**
- **Protect vulnerable consumers better**, for example by restricting the use in childcare and children’s products of chemicals that may cause cancer, change DNA or harm reproductive health (CMRs).
- **Enhance the safeguards for chemicals in all consumer products, including imports.** The EU aims to phase out CMRs, endocrine disruptors or chemicals that harm the environment from consumer products. In a second step, this approach may also be extended to chemicals that affect the immune, neurological or respiratory system.
- **Minimise exposure to endocrine disruptors (ED).** The Strategy commits the EU to ban EDs in consumer products, such as cosmetics, toys or food packaging as soon as they are identified. In addition, the Commission will propose a legal definition of EDs which will greatly facilitate the identification, regulation and phase-out of these harmful chemicals across the board.
- **Strengthen enforcement of EU chemicals legislation, including at the EU’s borders and on online market platforms.** The EU Commission vows zero tolerance on companies breaching chemical rules and will propose a minimum number of checks for Member States to perform.

## BEUC documents:

- [Manifesto for the 2019 European elections](#)
- On Endocrine disruptors:
- Infographic ‘[Endocrine disruptors throughout your day](#)’, 2019.
- [Factsheet](#)
- [BEUC position: ‘Hormone-disrupting chemicals: when will the EU act against these everyday toxicants?’](#), 2016
- Factsheet [Food contact materials](#)

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