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Long-delayed EU strategy on hormone disrupting chemicals – roll out is matter of urgency

Chemicals which change our hormonal system, so-called endocrine disrupting chemicals¹ (EDCs), are linked to severe health problems, including infertility, obesity, cancer and genital malformations. Today, the European Commission published a strategy on how the EU can address EDCs – a long overdue update to an earlier 1999 strategy. Consumers may encounter these harmful chemicals in many everyday products, such as cosmetics, toys or food packaging. The annual cost to European society caused by EDCs is estimated at 163 billion².

The Commission among other things outlined plans to clarify the – scattered³ – set of rules governing EDCs in consumer products and to identify where gaps exist and need to be filled. This is a welcome and much needed step towards better protecting consumers against endocrine disruptors. The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) expects that this strategy, while it only announces the EUs work in the years to come, will ensure that loopholes such as on EDCs in cosmetics, toys and food packaging are closed without delay.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, comments:

“EU action on endocrine disruptors is overdue. Hormone disturbing chemicals pose a serious threat to the health of current and future generations and too much time has been wasted bickering about definitions and testing methods. This strategy is a real chance to tackle the problem head-on.

“It would be irresponsible to adopt a wait-and-see approach. The gaps in consumer protection are evident: EU laws on cosmetics and toys fail to have any clout tackling EDCs, while for many product groups such as textiles or absorbent hygiene products no rules exist at all.

“Consumers in Europe care about the chemicals in the products they buy. A mobile phone app which informs consumers about undesirable substances developed by our member in Denmark, Forbrugerrådet Tænk, has for example been downloaded 280,000 times and used to scan 6 million products. A similar French app from consumer group, UFC-Que Choisir currently clocks more than 700,000 users.”

ENDS

¹ Endocrine disruptors refer to a diverse group of chemicals that interfere with the body’s sensitive hormonal system. Given their capacity to mimic, interfere and block natural hormones, exposure to even tiny amounts of these chemicals can cause severe and irreversible effects on humans and wildlife, such as infertility or hormone-related cancers.

² <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/andr.12178>

³ <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/89fbbb74-969c-11e7-b92d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>