Human health, environment, sustainable development: chemicals policy. White Paper

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PURPOSE : to propose a strategy for a future chemicals policy. CONTENT : this White Paper presents Commission proposal for a strategy on future chemicals policy in the Community with the overriding goal of sustainable development. The global production of chemicals has increased from 1 million tonnes in 1930 to 400 million tonnes today. The EU chemical industry was the world's largest in 1998, followed by that of the US with 28% of production value and a trade surplus of EUR 12 billion. The chemical industry is also Europe's third largest manufacturing industry. It employs 1.7 million people directly and up to 3 million jobs are dependent on it. As well as several leading multinationals, it also comprises around 36,000 SMEs. These SMEs represent 96% of the total number of enterprises and account for 28% of chemical production. In order to achieve the the overriding goal of sustainable development, the Commission has identified a number of objectives that must be met in order to achieve sustainable development in the chemicals industry within the framework of the Single Market: 1) Protection of human health and promotion of non-toxic environment: the Commission proposes that existing and new substances should in the future, following at the phasing in of existing substances until 2012, be subject to the same procedure under a single system; 2) Maintenance and enhancement of the competitiveness of the EU chemical industry: the Community policy in the field of chemical substances should aim to promote the competitiveness of the chemicals industry and encourage innovation, and in particular the development of safer chemical; 3) Prevent fragmentation of the internal market: it is imperative that the new policy be based on full harmonisation at Community level; 4) Increasing transparency: the public has a right to access to information about the chemicals to which they are exposed. This will enable them to make informed choices and to avoid products containing harmful chemicals. The creation of a single system it to be applied to all chemicals will improve the transparency of the regulation of chemicals; 5) Integration with international aspects: a global network of industrialised and developing countries and international organisations has developed over the past decades to promote global safe use of chemicals; 6) Promotion of non-animal testing: development of new non-animal test methods will be encouraged; 7) Conformity with EU international obligations under the WTO: the new policy shall not discriminate against imported products and it shall not create unnecessary obstacles to internatinoal trade. The proposed strategy must meet these objectives.