Public health: endocrine disrupters, consequences on human and animal health

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PURPOSE: to establish the first report (2001) on the progress made on the implementation of the Community Strategy concerning endocrine disrupters. CONTENT: a key short-term action of the Community Strategy is the establishment of a priority list of substances for further evaluation of their role in endocrine disruption. During 2000, a candidate list of 553 manmade substances and 9 synthetic/natural hormones has been identified. The candidate list has been divided into three separate groupings of substances depending on the level of information available, and a priority list of actions has been developed in order to further evaluate the role of these substances in endocrine disruption. Actions, timeframes and groupings of substances are presented in Annex 1 of this Communication. Regarding other short-term actions, the Commission is planning a European workshop on endocrine disrupters to organise with the sponsorship of the Swedish Ministry for Environment, Swedish National Chemicals Inspectorate (KEMI), OECD, WHO and the European Environment Agency. The workshop will take place on 18-20 June 2001 in Sweden and will focus on monitoring, research and development, test methods/testing strategy and international cooperation. The Commission has also held meetings with WHO and the US EPA during 2000 with a view to enhancing international cooperation. The Commission and Member States continue to participate in the OECD Endocrine Disrupter Testing and Assessment Task Force, which was set up in 1998 with the goal of developing agreed test for endocrine disrupters. The latest estimates are that agreed test methods for human health would be available in 2002 while tests for environmental effects are expected in the timeframe of 2003 to 2005. Furthermore, under the 5th Community Framework Programme for R&D (1999-2002), research into endocrine disruption has been prioritised in the latest revisions of the relevant work programmes. In addition, dedicated call for research proposals on the health and environmental implications of endocrine disrupters was published in May 2001 with a budgetary envelope of 20 MEURO. Finally, regarding legislative action, the proposed revision of the General Product Safety Directive proposes, inter-alia, a simplification of conditions and procedures for urgent measures at Community level. In addition, the issue of endocrine disrupters is addressed specifically in the context of new and existing legislation in the field of water policy and in the recent White Paper on a strategy for a future chemicals policy. Moreover, the report indicates that the year 2001 will be dedicated to the further evaluation of the role of the candidate substances in endocrine disruption, with first priority given to those substances with evidence of ED or potential ED which are neither restricted nor currently being addressed under existing Community legislation. The evaluation will include the identification of specific cases of consumer or ecosystem exposure which might warrant special consideration from a consumer and environmental policy point of view in the short-term. Equally, priority will be given during 2001-2002 to gathering data on a range of candidate ED substances and to launching a series of research projects aimed at filling the gaps in knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of endocrine disruption. In addition, the Commission invites the Member States to speed up the current risk assessment process for existing substances and plant protection products which appear on the ED candidate list and which are being addressed under existing Community legislation.