Endocrine-disrupting chemicals

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Research into endocrine-disrupting chemicals is still in its infancy. However, there is increasing unease about these chemical substances with hormone-mimicking effects because of their potentially serious effects on health (the development of hormone-driven forms of cancer, such as cancer of the breast or the testicles) and on reproductive capacity (a decline in sperm quality). Concern is growing also because such substances are found in everyday products such as pesticides, cosmetics and PVC. It was because of these concerns that Parliament decided draw up an own-initiative report (rapporteur: Kirsten JENSEN, PES, Dk), which was adopted unanimously by the Committee. The report argues that, on the basis of the precautionary principle, the Commission should submit a list of substances which may be regarded as hormone-mimicking. Those which are on the market should be phased out and new substances should not be granted marketing licences. This, believes the committee, is the only feasible approach, since it is difficult to set limit values in the current state of knowledge. National measures to control endocrine disrupters already exist but the report believes there is a need for a new EU framework directive based on a scientific and empirical approach. Given the striking lack of independent research in this area, the report calls for a research strategy to be developed at European level, using in particular the funding earmarked for life sciences under the Fifth Framework Research Programme. The research should focus on identifying endocrine disruptors, improving understanding of the endocrine system and on the adverse effects such substances may have on sperm quality, the nervous system and various endocrine glands such as the thyroid gland.