Endocrine-disrupting chemicals

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Adopting the report by Mrs Kirsten Jensen (PES, DK) on endocrine-disrupting chemicals, Parliament calls for chemical substances on the market which have an effect on the human endocrine system to be classified into groups according to risk. The possibly hazardous substances (pesticides such as DDT and its derivatives, industrial products, medicines and pollutants) work by simulating the action of natural hormones or interfering with their metabolism and affect human biology in four ways: a carcinogenic effect, or effects on the reproductive system, nervous system or immune system. But, as Parliament points out, there is still a great deal of uncertainty in research on endocrine disrupters. For this reason, pending a detailed risk assessment, the precautionary principle and constant vigilance should prevail. Regulations on chemical substances should stipulate compliance with the precautionary principle. Pending a more rigorous evaluation of the risks, Parliament calls for the following substances to be gradually withdrawn from the market: - substances which are not easily biodegradable, which accumulate in the organism with serious and irreversible effects on health and the environment; - substances which may be regarded as hormone-mimicking which are currently on the market. Parliament calls for integrated programmes to be implemented to reduce the use of plant protection products and promote ecological farming. It also calls on the Commission to amend directive 91/414/EEC (Annex II) so that an environmental impact assessment of the hormonal effects of pesticides is required. Particular attention is to be paid to other substances such as plasticisers, emulsifiers. etc. which may have a demonstrable endocrine-disrupting effect. These substances should be included in Directive 91/414/EEC and be appropriately labelled. With regard to exposure to the substances as such, Parliament - calls on the Commission and Council to take account of the hormonal effect of certain chemical substances in Community action in the field of water policy, - calls on industry to use chemicals primarily in closed processes, - calls on the Commission to use Directive 96/61/EC on integrated pollution prevention to control endocrine-disrupting chemicals, - calls on the Member States to make information on endocrine disrupters widely available, with the focus on reproductive health problems, on the basis that the right to know principle is the best way to enable people to maintain control over their own reproductive health rights, - calls on the Commission and the Member States to make coordinated efforts with a view to developing standardised tests for chemical substances to be placed on the market. With regard to research, Parliament calls on the Commission to draw up a comprehensive research strategy on this subject and for adoption by the end of 1998 of a provisional definition of endocrine disrupters in order to improve the comparability of research findings (this definition should be harmonised as far as possible with that adopted by the OECD member countries and should apply both to human beings and to wild species). Parliament calls on the Commission to set up a research network at EU level on endocrine disrupters and calls for industry to be involved in research. Parliament invites the EU to develop a research strategy at European level into the adverse effects of chemical substances on sperm quality, the nervous system, behaviour and the various endocrine glands (e. g. the thyroid). It calls for specific budget allocation to research to identify endocrine disrupters suspected of harming the foetus or having effects on the reproductive system in the context of the Fifth Framework Research Programme. Parliament also calls for scientific committees to assess the directive on health and cosmetics (foam baths and creams), PVC and toys, hormone-mimicking substances which can remain in clothes, etc. It also calls for research to taking account of the need for: - improved understanding of the endocrine and reproductive systems (including the role of hormones), - epidemiological studies on links between sexual abnormalities and their effects on other biological functions, including investigations of the effects on mothers and children of hormone disrupters and the role of other factors such as diet, location and socio-cultural origin; - long-term epidemiological studies, in different environments and geographical areas, on reproductive effects, including sperm quality. Noting the current international attempts to define persistent organic pollutants (POPs), it calls on the Commission to take part in this work. In general, Parliament would like the most dangerous substances replaced by less dangerous ones in the EU and for the EU to have an approval procedure for dangerous substances in the working environment, corresponding to the approval plus alternative assessment system for pesticides. It calls on

the Commission to examine whether the existing legislation on the marketing of new chemicals is adequate and if necessary to put forward amendments with regard to the potential effects of these substances. It calls for labelling regulations to be reviewed to ensure that each chemical product is labelled in an easily understandable way to show what level of substances not occurring in the natural environment it contains and that the risk category for these substances is displayed.