

TACD

TRANS ATLANTIC DIALOGUE TRANSATLANTIQUE
CONSUMER DIALOGUE DES CONSOMMATEURS

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CONSUMER GROUPS CALL ON U.S. TO CEASE CAMPAIGN TO WEAKEN EU CHEMICALS POLICY, RECOMMEND MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN REACH PROPOSAL

In advance of the EU-U.S. Summit in Dublin on June 25 2004, TransAtlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) representatives criticised the U.S. government's efforts to weaken an EU proposal to assess and regulate tens of thousands of potentially harmful industrial chemicals and recommended a number of ways to strengthen the proposal.

The proposed EU policy, called Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restrictions of Chemicals (REACH), is intended to secure data on and appropriately regulate 30,000 existing chemicals for which there is limited information on toxicity and environmental effects. The program, limited to chemicals produced in excess of one ton, would require manufacturers to register new chemicals before selling them and to register existing chemicals they want to keep on the market. Published reports indicate that the cutting-edge public health proposal has been subject to an intense transatlantic campaign to dismantle it before it is finalized, a campaign coordinated by U.S. government and the chemical industry.

“The Bush administration must immediately cease and desist its attack on the European REACH chemical safety system and reassess its position on the issue with a broad array of stakeholders instead of continually forwarding chemical industry positions in our name,” said Lori Wallach, Director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. “The current U.S. chemical policy has an abysmal track record of consumer protection, so rather than attacking the REACH policy, the administration should emulate it to safeguard U.S. consumers from the tens of thousands of unregulated, potentially dangerous chemicals on the market.”

Consumers from both sides of the Atlantic support the EU's precautionary approach to regulating chemicals. TACD, a coalition of more than 60 consumer groups in Europe and America, called on the EU to strengthen the proposal to include an assessment of all hazardous chemicals, including those produced in relatively small amounts.

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“We are all surrounded by tens of thousands of chemicals about which we know little,” according to Jim Murray, director of BEUC, the European Consumers Organisation. “We must find out more about the possible effects of these chemicals on our environment, on our bodies and on our children and future generations. REACH is a programme to assess these chemicals. It has been weakened by pressures on both sides of the Atlantic, and must be strengthened. TACD recommends that REACH be improved by strengthening authorization procedures for most dangerous chemicals and ensuring that all consumer articles containing chemicals substances are appropriately assessed and regulated.”

European and U.S. consumers face the same dilemma. They want to reduce the number of harmful chemicals they are exposed to at home, in the garden and at the office, yet laws on both sides of the Atlantic have focused on regulating *new* chemicals. They have failed to regulate the tens of thousands of *older* chemicals that have been on the market for decades, and very little data is publicly available about the potential hazards posed by the vast majority of these older chemicals.

Under current U.S. law, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can take action to restrict existing chemicals — more than 99% of what is on the market today by volume — only after conducting a chemical by chemical risk assessment. As a consequence, EPA has restricted fewer than 10 existing chemicals of an approximate 80,000 in 25 years. TACD believes that the U.S. is very much in need of a REACH-like policy.

Editors Note: On June 23, 2004 TACD decided to boycott the upcoming US-EU Summit in Ireland. For more information see: www.tacd.org. The TACD background briefing paper on regulating toxic chemicals can be viewed at: www.tacd.org/docs/?id=253. TACD consists of EU and US consumer organizations that develop joint consumer policy recommendations for the EU and US in an effort to promote the consumer interest in transatlantic policymaking.