

Chemicals management: Protecting human health and the environment

Chemical substances are the basis for life. They are present in everyone in a variety of forms, the main one of these being water. In the environment we live in we continuously interact with both natural and man-made chemicals, through the goods we buy, the healthcare we benefit from to accessing to telecommunication and media. A significant contributor to our economies, chemicals bring about innovative solutions to the modern society. The Chemical Industry Association (CIA) is fully committed to ensure its products are handled and used safely so as to avoid harm to human health and the environment.

Current Status

Chemicals and the products they go into – from cosmetics to DIY and cleaning products to toys and electronics – are strictly regulated to ensure that they are safe for use. Two key pieces of regulations facilitating safe chemicals management are the CLP Regulations (Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation) and the REACH Regulation (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals). One of the main aims of CLP Regulations is to determine whether chemical(s) display properties that lead to a hazardous classification. In this context, classification is the starting point for communicating identified hazards.

REACH is a major piece of regulation and created to ensure the safe use of chemicals. It applies to all uses of all substances throughout their whole life cycle, with obligations on all actors in the supply chain to collect or generate data on the substances and assess how to manage the risks to human health and the environment. Since its creation REACH has generated the largest database on chemicals with registered safety information on more than 17,000 substances. Parallel to this the framework continues to evaluate and address

potential risks posed by chemicals and as a consequence, some chemicals are forbidden for use in some goods. Most natural substances do not undergo the same level of rigorous safety testing as synthetic chemicals, so there is no guarantee that they are actually 'safer'. As a consequence CIA believe health and environmental concerns are important and should be publicly debated taking into consideration risk based science.

Industry programmes

Beyond regulations Industry's Long-Range Research Initiative research programme continues to advance approaches in the scientific assessment of chemical safety with the aim of improving our understanding of potential health and environmental risks. The CIA has also developed and promotes its Product Stewardship initiative, a major component of the industry's long-standing Responsible Care programme, which exists, to ensure that chemicals are handled properly throughout the entire supply chain. Individual companies also continue to deliver programmes tailored to their products and supply chains.

Our Opinions and Actions

The terms 'Hazard' and 'Risk' are often used interchangeably which can lead to chemical safety being misunderstood. Hazard is a property of a chemical that makes it capable of causing harm to human health or the environment. In everyday life we are constantly exposed to hazards from crossing roads to flying across the Atlantic. On the other hand, risk is the likelihood that a person could suffer an adverse health effect if exposed to a hazard under certain conditions. For example, by wearing a seat belt whilst driving considerably lowers the risk of injury as opposed to driving without a seat belt. Similarly risk reduction is an integral part of business in the chemical

industry and embedded into our processes whether it is to develop innovative products for society or protects our workers on site. In addition the idea that synthetic chemicals are systematically more harmful than those occurring in nature is not true. Ethanol, for example, whether produced through natural fermentation or from a petrochemical reaction, is the same chemical. It is important to remember that all synthetic ingredients used in consumer goods such as toys, cosmetics and food are strictly regulated. Their suitability is discussed and agreed by independent scientific committees and opinions from these committees are used to instruct legislation. Where a substance is clearly deemed to be harmful to human health or there is sound evidence to indicate that it may cause harm, the chemical industry endeavours to find safer alternatives. This process is referred to as substitution. The CIA fully supports the replacement of harmful products and technologies with safer alternatives.

Next steps

The chemical industry continues to work towards ensuring that society benefits from the use of its products, secure in the knowledge that we as an industry have taken all reasonable steps to prevent harm to human health and the environment. We recognise and welcome the evolving debate on chemical safety and encourage any future policy measures to be based on risk based science.

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