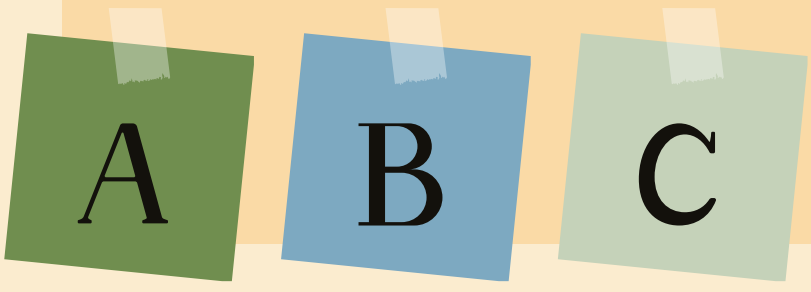
CHEMTrust
Protecting humans and wildlife from harmful chemicals

THE ABCs OF REACH

A mini guide to understanding
the main European chemicals safety law



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The REACH regulation is the main EU chemicals safety law.
It was introduced in 2006 to better protect people, wildlife, and the environment from harmful chemicals, while enhancing competitiveness and innovation towards safer chemicals.

But we are facing a chemical pollution problem and REACH is not up to the task.

Our lives have been silently polluted by harmful chemicals. Study after study shows that toxic chemicals are found in our everyday products [1], our drinking water [2] and in our bodies [3]. And we are finding more and more health problems linked to them: cancers [4][5], reduction in children's IQ [6] and infertility [7][8].

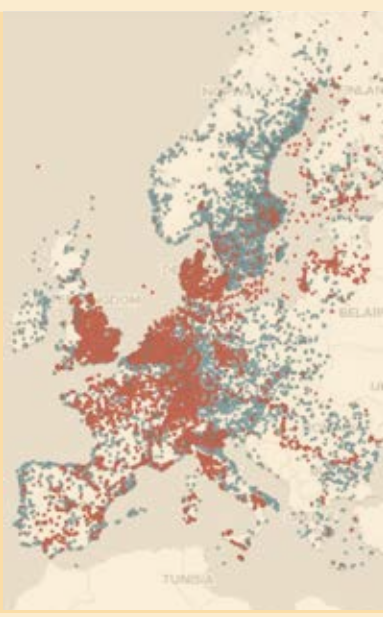
REACH was supposed to keep us safe.
Now is the time for action. We need to make REACH more protective.

The buildup of a 'forever pollution' legacy

PFAS are called 'forever chemicals' because they will remain and build up in our environment for generations to come. Some PFAS have also been shown to be toxic.

Certain producers knew about the dangers for decades, but deliberately kept the information hidden. [9]

PFAS pollution is widespread across the continent [10] and all European teenagers tested have PFAS in their blood [11].



WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

TOXIC POLLUTION KEEPS INCREASING

It is literally raining the 'forever chemicals' PFAS. [12] Many studies have found harmful chemicals in blood, umbilical cords and placentas [13], meaning that newborns start life already contaminated. Chemical pollution threatens the reproduction of wildlife, such as orcas. [14]

EVERYDAY PRODUCTS CONTAIN TOXIC CHEMICALS

We are exposed to toxic chemicals in the products we use every day - body lotions applied to our skin, the sofa we sit on and the packaging we wrap our sandwiches in. [15] Testing has found the 'forever chemicals' PFAS in countless products - from dental floss to raincoats.

ACTION IS TAKEN AT A SNAIL'S PACE

Regulatory action is very slow. It takes on average six years to restrict the use of a single harmful substance [16].

A SHOCKING LACK OF SAFETY INFORMATION

70% of registration dossiers don't adequately inform us whether the chemical substances are harmful and where they are being used. [17] This is not lawful, but has few repercussions, and the lack of information prevents authorities from taking protective action.

REACH STANDS IN THE WAY OF PROGRESSIVE COMPANIES

Some businesses innovate away from harmful chemicals before action is taken under REACH. [18] But this ambition is not rewarded: they face high investment costs and unfair competition from the other companies that complacently wait or even block progress. [19] [20]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

REACH NEEDS TO BECOME MORE PROTECTIVE.

A reform was promised under the last legislative mandate, but was postponed several times. We can wait no longer. With every month of delay, we are adding more toxic chemicals to the environment and our bodies.

THE REACH REVISION MUST HAPPEN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNDER THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE MANDATE.

By upgrading only one of the regulatory tools in REACH – the fast track restriction – the EU could save up to 31 billion euros in health costs. [21] It will protect our nature and help European companies to innovate towards safer chemicals.

 # REACH REVISION NOW

THE MAIN REACH PROCEDURES

It's all in the name - **REACH**
the **R**egistration, **E**valuation, **A**uthorisation and restriction of **CH**emicals

REGISTRATION

Chemical substances produced or put on the EU market above a certain tonnage must be registered. Companies provide information on the properties, uses, hazards and potential risks, and submit this to the ECHA in a registration dossier.

EVALUATION

There are two types of evaluations:

- of the registration dossier, also called a compliance check
- of the chemical substance, done in order to clarify if it poses a risk to human health or the environment.

AUTHORISATION

Substances of very high concern, abbreviated as SVHCs, can be added to the authorisation list. Once added to this list, companies need to apply for authorisations in order to continue the production and use of those substances. Imports are not covered by this provision.

RESTRICTION

Restrictions limit or ban the production, placing on the market (including imports), or the use of chemical substances. There are two types of restrictions, which we can classify as normal and fast track. The fast-track restriction only applies to consumer uses.

These processes are primarily managed by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

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GLOSSARY

PFAS are a group of over 10,000 chemicals, also known as 'forever chemicals', because of their extreme persistence in the environment. Some PFAS are linked to certain cancers, reproductive impacts and immune system problems.

Bisphenols are a big family of substances with similar chemical structures and uses. Some of the most well-known are bisphenol A and bisphenol S, which are known to damage fertility and disrupt the hormonal systems of both people and wildlife.

Endocrine disruptors are chemicals that can interfere with the endocrine or hormone system. They are linked to infertility, obesity and diabetes, heart disease, and different types of hormone related cancers.

The **cocktail effect** describes the effect of combined exposure of people and the environment to hundreds of chemicals, via different sources. Exposure to these chemical mixtures can result in greater harmful effects when combined, compared to the impact of the individual substances alone.

[1] BEUC, 2024. Repository of consumer products tested for harmful chemicals since 2017 until present

[2] CHEM Trust, 2023. PFAS water contamination scandals unfold across Europe

[3] E. Govarts et. al, 2023. Harmonized human biomonitoring in European children, teenagers and adults: EU-wide exposure data of 11 chemical substance groups from the HBM4EU Aligned Studies (2014–2021)

[4] Breast Cancer UK, 2022. BCUK Briefing: Bisphenols and Breast Cancer

[5] European Environment Agency, 2019. Emerging chemical risks in Europe - 'PFAS'

[6] CHEM Trust, 2017. No Brainer: The impact of chemicals on children's brain development: a cause for concern and a need for action

[7] Levine et al, 2017. Temporal trends in sperm count: a systematic review and metaregression analysis. Human Reproduction Update

[8] Kortenkamp et al, 2022. Combined exposures to bisphenols, polychlorinated dioxins, paracetamol, and phthalates as drivers of deteriorating semen quality. Environment International

[9] Zembla, 2023. DuPont already knew 30 years ago about extreme PFAS pollution in Dutch groundwater

[10] The Forever Pollution Project, 2023. Journalists tracking PFAS across Europe

[11] D. Richterová et al., 2023. PFAS levels and determinants of variability in exposure in European teenagers - Results from the HBM4EU aligned studies (2014-2021). International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health

[12] Persson et al., 2022. Outside the Safe Operating Space of the Planetary Boundary for Novel Entities. Environmental Science & Technology

[13] Environmental Working Group, 2022. Pregnant with PFAS: The threat of 'forever chemicals' in cord blood

[14] Desforges et al, 2018. Predicting global killer whale population collapse from PCB pollution. Science

[15] BEUC, 2024. Ibid.

[16] EEB, 2022. The Need for Speed: Why it takes the EU a decade to control harmful chemicals and how to secure more rapid protections

[17] European Environment Agency, 2019. The European environment - state and outlook 2020: Knowledge for transition to a sustainable Europe, Chapter 10: Chemical pollution

[18] ChemSec, 2022. A company request for an ambitious revision of REACH

[19] Toxic-Free for EU, 2023. Toxic-free investments in consumer products at risk, warns company

[20] CEO, 2023. Chemical romance: how politicians fell for BASF

[21] Le Monde, 2023. Banning the most harmful chemicals could help Europe save up to €31 billion a year

WHO WE ARE

CHEM Trust works to protect people and wildlife from harmful synthetic chemicals, including extremely persistent chemicals and those that interfere with our endocrine system. We do this by ensuring that such chemicals are substituted with safer alternatives.

CHEM Trust is a charity based in Germany and the UK.

We are registered in the EU Transparency Register as Chemicals, Health and Environment Monitoring Trust (CHEM Trust), with the ID number 27053044762-72. Registered Charity No. 1118182.

STAY UP TO DATE WITH OUR WORK

#ToxicFree4EU – our weekly briefing on the latest policy and political developments on the chemicals agenda.

Food for Thought - a newsletter with updates on food contact materials policy, published together with Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Zero Waste Europe.

CHEM Trust newsletter – covering our activities in the EU and UK

CONTACT

Ioana Bere, EU Policy advocate
ioana.bere@chemtrust.org
+32 (0) 223 520 10

chemtrust.org
X: @CHEMTrust
LinkedIn: CHEM Trust
Instagram: @chem_trust

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Discover our work at CHEM Trust

REACH needs a delivery target - toxic-free products by 2030
A position paper explaining why the EU's chemicals law also needs a target and why we should focus on consumer products.

FAQ: PFAS and the green transition
A briefing explaining the PFAS problem and how the EU market is already moving towards PFAS-free solutions for different green transition technologies such as solar panels, heat pumps and semiconductors.

Throwaway Packaging, Forever Chemicals
A report showing the pervasive presence of PFAS chemicals in food packaging. This report also shows how regulation can successfully facilitate the replacement of PFAS with safer alternatives.

Chemical cocktails - The neglected threat of toxic mixtures and how to fix it
This report highlights the reality of our exposure to multiple chemicals, and the threat it poses to our health and the wider environment. We also present workable and effective policy solutions to address this complex problem.

No Brainer: the impact of chemicals on children's brain development
This report highlights how chemicals in food and consumer products used in homes, schools and offices could harm brain development in children.
The impacts may include ADHD and lower IQ and could prevent children from reaching their full potential.

From BPA to BPZ: a toxic soup?
A report on how industry is being allowed to replace the well-known hormone disrupting chemical bisphenol A (BPA), with very similar chemicals that may also be harmful.