

REACH - Progress in 2004

The European Chemicals Agency

The 12 months since the last IBC conference on REACH have seen considerable activity with regards to the mechanics of implementing the REACH programme.

We now have confirmation that the new European Chemicals Agency (ECA) will be located in Helsinki, Finland. It will have about 200 staff and will cost in the region of € 30 million/year to run, much of which will come from industry in the form of fees.

In setting up the Agency, the Commission has taken note of the previous experiences of other agencies in introducing “new elements” specific to the chemicals area. The current intention is for the ECA to play more of a coordination role rather than that of a recognised “regulatory authority.” However, pressure from some quarters to endow the ECA with more powers may lead to change in the future.

Of direct importance to industry will be the Secretariat, which is charged with the responsibility of providing scientific, technical and administrative support to the various committees set up to deal with risk assessments, socioeconomic analysis, evaluations and issues related to high risk substances.

Another function that will no doubt gain importance will be the Board of Appeal, where any appeals against an ECA decision will be heard.

RIP - Implementation projects & Technical committees

These are tasked with the development of the tools, processes, guidance documents and training schemes essential for the smooth running of what will be a highly complicated procedure. The complicated nature of REACH is highlighted in 2 publications. April saw publication from RIP 1 of the “*Flowcharts on the new EU chemicals legislation REACH.*” This is a 14 page set of highly detailed flow diagrams covering almost all practical aspects of the REACH process. Following on from this was “*The REACH Proposal Process description,*” which adds detail to the flow diagrams. The document covers a range of topics from the registration process through the supply chain, to downstream users to the evaluation, authorisation and restrictions that will apply to the more hazardous substances. The report goes on to sum up the duties of users dealing with substances in quantities of less than 1 tonne.

The second RIP group has the responsibility for the development of the central support systems, software, and databases, collectively known as REACH-IT.

Critical to the success of REACH are a number of documents describing in detail the requirements, problems and intentions of systems that will allow both internal and external access. Work is progressing on a major upgrade of IUCLID. Left to the imagination is the scale of the problems involved in the development of systems necessary for the electronic transfer of many documents on a daily basis.

Technical Meetings and Working Groups

The current Technical Meetings and Working Groups are to be restructured. The Scientific and Technical Meetings for existing and new substances will be merged; a new committee on the classification, labelling and health effects is replacing three working groups previously responsible for CMR's (Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reproductive toxins) and the health effects of new substances and pesticides. The 3rd new committee, titled Technical Committee on Classification and Labelling of Environmental Effects, replaces the 3 working groups on the environment effects.

Strategic Partnerships

The Commission has proposed the creation of Strategic partnerships aimed to test run the processes and mechanisms developed for REACH.

Set up by Cefic, SPORT (Strategic Partnership on REACH Testing) will look at the feasibility of REACH, identify problems, and suggest remedies. A report is expected mid 2005.