



the campaign for
environmentally responsible
health care

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September 9, 2003
President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
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Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of public health professionals, physicians, nurses, children's health advocates, environmental organizations, and community groups, we are writing to express our deep concerns about the United States government efforts to undermine proposed reforms of the European Union chemicals policy also known as REACH (Registration, Evaluation, and Authorization of Chemicals). We request that you instruct key officials within your administration to stop using federal funds to undermine this important proposed legislation, and seek ways to support progressive reform of chemicals policy that benefit public health.

The U.S. Administration has actively lobbied against the European proposals for reform through actions of the State Department, Department of Commerce, US Trade Representative, and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We find it particularly troubling that the position of the US government closely reflects the narrow interests of U.S. chemical manufacturers, to the exclusion of other business sectors who will benefit from the production of cleaner, safer chemicals, as well as public health and environmental advocates working to secure policies that will safeguard the American and European public from dangerous chemicals.

Recent scientific evidence from the United States, Canada, and Europe demonstrates that untested, unregulated chemicals are accumulating in human body tissue and breast milk. Toxicological findings indicate that exposures to even low doses of certain chemicals can result in profound yet subtle effects including birth defects, reproductive disorders, and neurological abnormalities. We are particularly concerned about a variety of ubiquitous substances that have been measured in the general public. For some, like mercury, their toxicity is beyond doubt. For others, adequate toxicity testing data are simply not available. The public's continued exposure to these substances vividly demonstrates the need for comprehensive safety testing in order to protect human health and the environment.

The chemical management system proposed under REACH addresses many of the flaws of the current system both in the United States and Europe. As you know, lax chemical regulations in the U.S. have created a situation whereby an estimated 95% percent of the chemicals in commerce today lack basic testing data on potential health and environmental impacts.

REACH would begin to fill in the information blanks by first and foremost demanding better health data for the existing and new chemicals produced or used in quantities greater than one ton per year. It would also restrict and in some cases ban the use of chemicals that are inherently harmful, i.e. carcinogens,

mutagens, and reproductive toxins, in addition to those chemicals that persist and accumulate in the environment. Requiring manufacturers to demonstrate that a particular chemical is safe to use in commerce is a commonsense and long overdue approach to chemical management.

The United States government and the chemical industry claim that the costs of increased scrutiny of chemicals proposed in REACH will place a burden on business. However, the latest estimates from the European Commission put the total costs of the REACH reforms at €4 billion -- or just 0.1 percent of annual chemical sales in the European Union. This is a very modest investment in environmental protection, especially in comparison to the billions of dollars spent on health care, pollution control, and cleanup of contamination caused by chemicals.

The US government and chemical industry opposition to REACH also neglects the immeasurable cost of human suffering and disease due to poorly regulated environmental pollutants. The monetary costs alone are staggering. In the US, scientists from the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine estimated that the total annual costs attributable to environmental pollutants for children's lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and neurobehavioral disorders totaled \$54.9 billion. In the EU, Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström estimates that REACH will save \$20 to \$60 billion in health care costs over the next thirty years, as well as reduce 2,200 to 4,300 cancer cases per year.

We urge the U.S. government to recognize the potential benefits to American consumers and businesses and cease all efforts to undermine EU chemicals policy reforms. We request that the Administration, through the U.S. EPA, the U.S. Trade Representative, Commerce Department, and State Department, solicit public comments from the American people -- including but not limited to NGOs and businesses - - to formulate a forward-looking position on chemicals policy and prepare for new economic realities of the 21st century.

For more information concerning this issue, please contact:

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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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CC:

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The Hon. Donald Evans, Secretary, Department of Commerce
The Hon. Marianne Lamont Horinko, Acting Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
The Hon. Robert Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative
The Hon. James Connaughton, Chairman, Council on Environmental Quality

US House of Representatives

The Hon. Billy Tauzin, Committee on Energy and Commerce
The Hon. John Dingell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
The Hon. Paul Gillmor, Chair, Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials
The Hon. Hilda Solis, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials
The Hon. Cliff Stearns, Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection
The Hon. Jan Schakowsky, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection
The Hon. Tom Davis, Chair, House Committee on Government Reform
The Hon. Henry Waxman, Ranking Minority Member, House Committee on Government Reform

US Senate

The Hon. James Inhofe, Chair, Committee on the Environment and Public Works
The Hon. James Jeffords, Ranking Member, Committee on the Environment and Public Works
The Hon. Lincoln Chafee, Chair, Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk, and Waste Management
The Hon. Barbara Boxer, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk, and Waste Management
The Hon. John McCain, Chair, Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
The Hon. Fritz Hollings, Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
The Hon. Susan Collins, Chair, Committee on Governmental Affairs
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