

HCF: Chemical Industry Regulation

The European chemical regulation called REACH was discussed in the Chemical Industry Regulation session. The session was moderated by Mr Erkki Liikanen, Governor of the Bank of Finland and former European Commissioner.

“REACH definitely affects global trade policy because the EU is one of the largest importers of chemicals and end products,” said **Klaus Berend** of the European Commission. Even if similar chemical legislation is not applied on other continents, market forces will force countries outside the EU to take into account the requirements set by REACH.

The panellists from outside the European Union were slightly sceptical of REACH. Mr Dmitry Skobelev of the Russian Scientific-Research Centre on Standardisation, Certification and Testing of Materials said the implementation of REACH or similar regulation would not be possible in Russia because of the differences in legislation.

Asia is currently the leading exporter and importer of chemicals. China is one of the European Union’s most important trade partners. Mr Zhou Hongda of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association affirmed that China has taken REACH requirements seriously. He favours a coherent international chemicals risk evaluation system and reminded the meeting that China is already committed to the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals run by the United Nations.

Mr Zhou Hongda also doubted the feasibility and timetable requirements for the Substance Information Exchange Forums (SIEFs) in a situation where 143 000 substances were pre-registered instead of the anticipated 30 000.

In the US the law firm of McKenna Long & Aldridge has surveyed the business community for their experiences in implementing REACH. Mr Robert Matthews from McKenna Long & Aldridge criticised the chemical regulation for being too complicated. He also wondered if company resources would be sufficient to cope with such regulation and noted that the US supports voluntary efforts by companies rather than bureaucratic regulations.

Mr Martin Kayser from the chemical company BASF highlighted the environmental advantages of voluntary chemical industry efforts. Now that the risk evaluation system is fully effective in Europe the European chemical companies are already implementing it and are currently strengthening their resources to fulfil REACH requirements.

The panellists agreed that it should be possible for the work conducted by the European chemical companies to be utilised globally, so that the information gathered and screened for REACH can be used throughout the world. This applies especially to substance features and research related to them.

All the chemical industry stakeholder groups agreed that new instruments are needed for spreading the information globally. REACH information could be utilised either through voluntary efforts by the industry or via international contracts.

The world’s chemical producers have already established a voluntary system called Global Product Stewardship for gathering and transmitting the information required by REACH throughout the world.

An international agreement could be realised within the United Nations’ Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) programme. The European Commission has suggested a

modular system, as a part of SAICM, for international chemicals management to share this extra workload in each country.

It is important for the chemical industry to have similar risk management systems everywhere in the world. This is also a basic prerequisite if the information collected through REACH is to be useful globally.

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