Key features of the proposed REACH system

Aims and objectives

In introducing the REACH proposal, the European Commission has seven main objectives:

- Protection of human health and the environment
- Maintenance and enhancement of the competitiveness of the EU
- Prevention of fragmentation of the internal market
- Increased transparency
- Integration with international efforts
- Promotion of non-animal testing
- Conformity with EU international obligations under the WTO.

The proposal aims to address a number of short-comings found in the current systems relating to the supply and assessment of chemicals, including:

- the lack of available information on risks to human health and the environment from the many substances on the EU market;
- the slow and resource-intensive nature of the current system;
- the need for responsibility for the assessment of chemicals to shift from the regulatory authorities to industry;
- the lack of information on uses of substances.

Expected Timetable

Negotiations are ongoing in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The co-decision procedure, involving negotiations in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, is now underway and a working group of officials from Member States have begun to consider the Regulation in detail. Once the negotiations have concluded, mechanisms will need to be put in place to handle the work both at Member State level and in the new European Chemicals Agency.

Stage 1: The first stage, applying three years after the Regulation comes into force, requires the registration of substances manufactured or imported in quantities of 1000 tonnes per year and above, plus those that meet the criteria for classification as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction categories 1 or 2 under Directive 67/548/EEC.

Stage 2: The second stage, applying six years after the Regulation comes into force, requires the registration of substances manufactured or imported in quantities at 100 tonnes per year and above.

Stage 3: The final stage comes into effect eleven years after the Regulation comes into force, and applies to the registration of substances manufactured or imported in quantities of 1 tonne per year and above.