MINIMISING THE IMPACT OF ENDOCRINE DISRUPTING CHEMICALS ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

A scientific update following the Joint Congress of ESPE and ESE 2025

Legacy Event – 14 May 2025
Press briefing note: Regulation and testing of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in Europe

Relevant presentations at event:

- "The potential and current limitations of new approach methodologies (NAMs) in identifying endocrine disruptors with a focus on reproductive toxicity" – Prof Terje Svingen, National Food Institute, Technical University of Denmark
- "Perspective from the European Commission on the ongoing EU debate around EDCs and priorities for the future" – Mr Paul Speight, Head of Unit, Safe & Sustainable Chemicals (ENV.B.2), European Commission
- "MEP intervention: The steps needed at the EU level to tackle EDCs" – MEP Martin Hojsík, Renew Europe Group, Slovakia
- "MP intervention: Update on the political debate around EDCs in Denmark" – MP Karin Liltorp, The Alternative, Denmark

Issue

Exposure to EDCs has been associated with a variety of rare cancers (especially in children), reduced fertility, neurodevelopmental disorders, thyroid disease, metabolic illnesses (e.g. diabetes, hypertension and obesity), birth defects, osteoporosis and numerous other health conditions.

Despite evidence of the harmful effects of EDCs:
- Approximately 100,000 chemicals are available on the EU market, of which 70% have not been tested for their effects on human health
- Worldwide, 350,000 chemicals are registered for commercial use, yet many remain poorly understood in terms of exposure, hazards and risks.

Improving EDC testing

EDC testing remains inadequate in both scope and sensitivity. While some tests, such as those assessing reproductive toxicity or thyroid disruption, are already in place, many are outdated or insufficiently sensitive. Many are only required for high-production chemicals. This limits their reliability and regulatory impact. Testing is often limited to individual substances and fails to factor in the "cocktail effect", meaning the combined exposure to multiple EDCs.

In addition, thousands of chemicals currently in commercial use across the EU have not been assessed for their endocrine-disrupting properties. Industry is not required to submit independent, peer-reviewed data to demonstrate safety and testing requirements vary across EU legislation, creating inconsistency and regulatory blind spots. Stronger regulatory pressure will drive greater accountability from industry and encourage innovation toward safer chemical use in consumer products.

During the Legacy Event, some speakers will also address the development and uptake of NAMs, such as in vitro and computational tools. These offer opportunities to enhance testing capacity, fill knowledge gaps and reduce reliance on animal studies.

Strengthening the REACH Regulation

Coordinated action is essential to improve testing methods and develop sustainable approaches to managing the short- and long-term consequences of EDC exposure. We need policymakers to support legislation that will effectively reduce the population's exposure to EDCs through an overall ban on the use of proven or suspected EDCs.

The European endocrine community considers an ambitious revision of the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) regulation to be a top priority. The new legislation must be in line with the Commission's objectives in the EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, reflect the latest scientific findings and close current loopholes in the EU chemicals legislation.

Five key points are particularly important for future legislation to address:

1) Application of the precautionary principle for suspected (category 2) EDCs as outlined in the CLP classification of hazard classes. These substances should not be allowed on the EU market until thorough assessments confirm they pose no hazard to human or animal health or to biodiversity.
2) Ban on the use of EDCs in all consumer products, including cosmetics and toys.
3) Broad adoption of new, innovative and more sensitive test methods currently being developed under EU projects such as the EURION cluster. These methods should also be promoted to the OECD and included in testing requirements for EDC identifications.
4) Group restrictions for bisphenols, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other EDC chemical groups that have been repeatedly proven to be hazardous. This would ensure that harmful substances are not substituted with equally hazardous ones.
5) Universal ban on PFAS, with only limited exemptions for society-critical applications.

Background on REACH

The REACH Regulation came into force in the European Union (EU) on 1 June 2007. The aim was to improve protection of human health and the environment from the risks posed by chemicals, while enhancing the competitiveness of the EU chemicals industry.

As part of the Green Deal and the development of a Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the previous European Commission committed to revise the REACH legislation and implement more stringent criteria for approving and reassessing chemicals.

Unfortunately, publication has been delayed and is now expected to be published in Q4 2025 under the guidance of the new Commission.

Why does this matter?

An ambitious revision of REACH would be a major step towards reducing the presence of EDCs in consumer products and our environment. Given the proven links between EDC exposure and endocrine conditions, this would have a significant impact on population health in Europe.

However, we have concerns that the upcoming REACH revision will simplify the current rules without fully reflecting the need to protect populations from harmful EDC exposure. For this reason, it is important that we (the European endocrine community) continue to share our views on REACH and EDCs in general to educate policy makers and the public on the risks EDCs pose for our health and environment.

Action to date

To urge the Commission to publish the REACH revision, the European and international endocrine community has undertaken several initiatives:

- In April 2023 a petition was presented to the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, signed by 44 international and European national and specialist endocrine societies. This was followed by a similar petition signed by eight international patient associations representing around 300 global patient organisations in the world and more than 40 national endocrine patient organisations.
- On 7 June 2023, the endocrine community held a high-level policy event on EDCs in the European Parliament, hosted by MEPs Martin Hojsík (Slovakia) and Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland).
- In November 2024, members of the endocrine community urged MEPs to press the Commission on the REACH file during the confirmation hearings of the Commissioners-designate.
- On 5 March 25, a delegation of experts associated with ESE and the Endocrine Society visited EU commissioner Jessika Roswall and discussed with the team of EU Commissioner Teresa Ribera, calling for an ambitious revision of REACH, informed by the latest scientific evidence

- On 24 April 2025, ESE, ESPE and the Endocrine Society submitted a statement to the Competent Authorities on REACH and CLP Implementation (CARACAL). This joint contribution to the technical discussions on REACH focuses on provisions relating to the control of EDCs.

What next?

The endocrine community must continue to push for the urgent publication of a strengthened REACH revision in line with the latest science and contribute to other ongoing EDC-related debates. These include the proposal to reduce emissions from polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) through a universal ban on the use of these compounds. Exemptions are already being suggested by industry that may significantly reduce the impact of the ongoing PFAS restriction proposal.

More information

- ESE's advocacy activities on EDCs
- Update on REACH proposals by European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)
- Information on proposal to reduce emissions from polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)
- Information on the work of EURION, the cluster group of eight research projects to improve testing and screening methods to identify EDCs.