

CHEMICALWATCH

Briefing businesses on REACH and chemical risks

Business-NGO group launches roadmap for safer chemicals

Product disclosure, substitution of hazardous chemicals are key to chemicals roadmap

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A business-NGO coalition was unveiled in the USA today that pledges to phase out the use of hazardous chemicals from members' products and has a mission to lobby for greater availability of hazard and risk data, and substitution of the most hazardous chemicals.

Known as the “Business-NGO Working Group for Safer Chemicals and Sustainable Materials”, the organisation already has a two-year history. But its meetings have until now been conducted behind closed doors as members – many from mainstream businesses – have forged a new way of discussing chemicals with the NGOs involved, led by Clean Production Action.

The group has now published a set of 'Guiding Principles for Chemicals Policy' constituting a 'roadmap' for companies that want to capitalise on the opportunity created by growing consumer demand for safer products containing no or low toxicity chemicals.

“Companies who sign on [to these] are demonstrating a commitment to creating products that are better for public health and the environment,” said Roger McFadden vice-president of product science and technology at Corporate Express, part of the Staples group.

In summary, the four principles cover:

- **Disclosure of product chemistry** – this requires greater transparency by manufacturers and greater efforts by purchasers to demand to know what is in products;
- **Assess and avoid hazards** – companies to identify the chemicals they use, their hazard and risk profiles and prioritise substances for substitution;

- **Commit to continuous improvement** – corporate governance structures need to be created to regularly review products and process chemistry with the aim of reducing hazard potential;
- **Advocacy** – to support comprehensive data availability for chemicals on the market; eliminate or reduce known hazards in order to promote a greener economy.

Companies that have endorsed the principles include: Construction Specialities, Corporate Express, Earthbound Form, Hospira Inc, True Textiles Inc, Whole Foods and others. In addition, they are supported by 11 investment bodies, four healthcare organisations and 18 NGOs including the International Chemical Secretariat (ChemSec), which is spearheading an EU initiative – the SIN List – to ban hazardous chemicals.

Another key element of the group's agenda is to facilitate a transition away from petrochemical-based products to bio-based renewable chemicals. It is in the process of carrying out a survey of food service ware producers to ask their views and experience of using bio-based plastics. It will then use the responses to draw up criteria for sustainable bio-based plastics.

The group also hopes to demonstrate a new way of working between businesses and NGOs that requires transparency and pragmatism on both sides.

At its meeting this week, the group will discuss next steps including how to follow up on implementation of the guiding principles by endorsing organisations.

- [Business-NGO working group site](#)