



Consumer Voice

Newsletter on food safety, health and consumer policy
From the European Commission's Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General

June 2003



David Byrne
Commissioner for
Health and Consumer Protection

Editorial

Some months we are reminded, in very concrete ways, that hard work does pay off. I am especially proud that, on 16 June, the EU was among the first to sign the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The EU has indeed played a leading role in developing and promoting tobacco control policies. In addition to this success, I see the month of June as a celebration of the day-to-day practical management of consumer, food safety and public health issues. In June, we issued down-to-earth preventative guidelines outlining practical steps to help EU citizens minimise their risk of developing cancer. We made a far-reaching proposal to clamp down on unfair commercial practices – a legislative package to boost the practical functioning of the EU's internal market and help business and consumers alike (a special edition of *Consumer Voice* on this issue will be available shortly). And the agriculture ministers agreed to our proposed Directive to manage future outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease – a Directive that details the practical measures to be used to rapidly control and eradicate the disease and minimise the impact on trade. Emergency vaccination is moved to the forefront of control measures, instead of being the last resort. The agreement is a very practical reform.

IN THIS EDITION

EU amongst first to sign Convention on Tobacco Control	1
EU launches Code against cancer	2
EU Ministers support eHealth initiative	2
EFSA now open for business	2-3
Avian flu crisis nearing resolution	3
New Foot-and-Mouth measures	3
Safety of consumer services	3-4
European EEJ-Net review	4

EU amongst first to sign Convention on Tobacco Control

Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner David Byrne and Greek Health Minister Costas Stefanis were in Geneva on 16 June to sign the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on behalf of the European Union.

Prior to a signing ceremony, Mr. Byrne received the World Health Organisation Director-General's Award for leadership in global tobacco control. "It is important to get the first 40 ratifications of the FCTC as soon as possible to reverse the rising death-toll from tobacco in developing countries," said Commissioner Byrne commenting on the agreement.



© WHO / P. Viot

David Byrne (right) receives the WHO Director-General's Award from Derek Yach, WHO Executive Director of the Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health cluster

The FCTC was adopted by Ministers from all 192 member countries of the World Health Organisation (WHO) at its annual World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003.

Negotiated under the auspices of WHO, the FCTC is the first international, legal instrument designed to counter the harmful effects of tobacco consumption. It aims to protect health by preventing tobacco advertising, requiring larger health warning labels on tobacco products, measures to protect against second hand smoke, tobacco tax and price increases and efforts to clamp down on tobacco smuggling. Worldwide, tobacco-related disease now claims nearly five million lives every year.

For more information about the FCTC and the WHO's tobacco control policies see: <http://tobacco.who.int>

For more details about EU policies on tobacco control see: http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/Tobacco_en.htm

CEE: XXIV/14



⇒ News in brief: Public Health

2 June - Employment Social Policy Health and Consumer Affairs Council reaches unanimous political agreement on Human Tissues and Cells Directive

5 June - European Commission issues report on the measures undertaken by Member States to control the outbreak of SARS

11 June - European Commission adopts a Communication outlining an EU strategy on the Environment and Health.

■ Declaration on eHealth

The Declaration welcomes the Commission Communication on Quality Criteria for health-related websites and encouraged the Commission to explore the possibilities of EU level Quality Seals for health websites. Ministers expressed their renewed commitment to developing national and regional eHealth implementation plans and to exploring the possibilities for co-ordinating these at European level.

■ A list of EFSA's panels:

The full list of panels is as follows:

1. Food additives, flavourings, processing aids and materials in contact with food.
2. Additives and products or substances used in animal feed.
3. Plant health, plant protection products and their residues.
4. Genetically modified organisms.
5. Dietetic products, nutrition and allergies.
6. Biological hazards.
7. Contaminants in the food chain.
8. Animal health and welfare.

Over time, the number, responsibilities and membership of the panels may be adapted to take into account new developments relating to food safety.

EU launches a code against cancer

A new European Code against Cancer was launched on 17 June at the European Institute of Oncology in Milan. The Code sets out 11 recommendations, with the basic message that certain cancers may be avoided and general health improved if people adopt a healthier lifestyle and follow screening. It recommends breast, cervix and colorectal screening.

The Code is a revision of one drawn up in 1987 and aims to reduce the number of cancer deaths in the EU by 20% by the year 2015. If this target is met, it will mean 300,000 fewer cancer deaths each year in the EU.

"This new target is ambitious but achievable. We know that effective prevention and screening policies can deliver the results we want to see. The challenge across Europe is to ensure these policies are put firmly into practice," said David Byrne, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection.

Further information: <http://www.cancercode.org>

European Ministers support eHealth initiative

The first ever European eHealth Ministerial Conference on "health in the information society" (eHealth) took place in Brussels on 22-23 May.

Health Ministers and Telecommunications Ministers from the EU25, EFTA and candidate countries debated how technology can assist in delivering better and more cost-effective healthcare to European citizens. The conference was hosted by the European Commission and the Greek Presidency of the EU, and included an exhibition of "best practice" eHealth projects from around Europe.

The Ministerial debate included important contributions from Erkki Liikanen, Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society, and David Byrne, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection. Costas Stefanis, Greek Minister for Health, issued a Declaration on behalf of the EU Presidency, which was endorsed by all the Ministers and the Commissioners. Key themes emerged, including the already extensive experience of the Candidate countries in this important area of health policy, and the importance of working together at European level to develop fully integrated systems in support of patients and citizens.

More information :

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/ehealth/conference/2003/index_en.htm

EFSA now open for business

The Scientific Committee and panels of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have been appointed, allowing EFSA to become operational in its main task of risk assessment. During their meetings between 21-27 May, they formally took over responsibility for the scientific assessment of food safety issues from the European Commission.

EFSA's main mission is to provide independent scientific advice, in response to questions submitted by the Commission, Parliament, Member States or by the Authority itself, on all matters with a direct or indirect impact on food safety. It is also tasked with risk communication relating to its main risk assessment remit, an important element of



which is direct communication with the public. Provisionally based in Brussels, EFSA is awaiting a decision on its definitive headquarters.

The Scientific Committee is responsible for ensuring consistency between the panels and is composed of the Chairs of each of the panels plus six independent experts.

Avian influenza crisis nearing resolution

Measures adopted to stop the spread of Avian Influenza in the Netherlands were lifted in all unaffected regions as of 18 June. The export of live poultry and hatching eggs from certain parts of the Netherlands was re-authorised, provided no further outbreaks are recorded. For the five previously affected provinces (Flevoland, Gelderland, Limburg, Noord-Brabant and Utrecht), restrictions will remain in place until 11 July. The restrictions imposed on the two affected Belgian provinces (Antwerp and Limburg) expired on 11 June. Restrictions now apply only in the "surveillance zones" (10 km around the outbreaks). All measures relating to Avian Influenza in the German province of North-Rhine Westphalia were lifted as of 25 June. This is the only German province that was affected. The rapid and effective action taken by the German authorities allowed the disease to be controlled, limiting it to one single outbreak.

New Foot-and-Mouth Measures

On 12 June, the Council of Agriculture Ministers reached political agreement on a new foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) Directive which aims to improve EU measures to control outbreaks of this disease. The amended Directive sets out in detail the measures needed to rapidly control and eradicate the disease. Significantly, it also outlines the procedures for how to recover the status "free of FMD and infection without vaccination", which is of crucial importance for trade.

FMD is not dangerous for human health, but outbreaks of this highly contagious viral disease in livestock have an exceptional economic impact on rural and national economies in the EU and on the psycho-social situation of the communities affected by the disease and the control measures.

The details of new legislation cover the whole range of actions needed, from the notification of a suspect case through to the measures to be taken in relation to animals and their products during an outbreak, until disease and infection free status is regained. A key element in this new legislation is that it gives emergency vaccination an important role in tackling an outbreak, thereby allowing a more flexible reaction to any future outbreak. It also makes provisions for a high level of disease preparedness, notably contingency planning and vaccine banks. The possibility of infection in wildlife is also covered. The Directive will enter into force in July 2004.

Safety of consumer services

On 6 June, the Commission adopted a report on the safety of services for consumers. Based on a public consultation conducted by the Commission in 2002, it provides a basis for future EU initiatives on the safety of services.

Investigations carried out by the Commission in preparing its report, highlighted gaps in the availability of data on service safety and related risks. Systematic data collection and accident monitoring are limited to a few sectors such as transport and health. For other sectors, data are scarce and not detailed enough to interpret with any certainty.

■ Commission approves new BSE tests

On 19 June, the European Commission approved two new rapid BSE tests (Prionics Check LIA and In Pro CD-5) designed to detect BSE in brain material collected from dead animals. So far, tests designed to detect BSE in live animals have not been evaluated. The three currently approved tests are Prionics Check Western, Bio-Rad TeSeE and the Enfer BSE test. The two new tests should help to stimulate more competition in the field. All five tests are also provisionally approved to detect TSE in sheep and goats, pending a formal evaluation.

⇒ News in brief: Food safety

10 June - European Commission approves two novel foods (Noni juice and DHA rich oil) for use as food ingredients.

11 June - Commission guidelines published for third country national authorities on the import into the EU of live animals and animal products.

16 June - The import into the EU of U.S. prairie dogs and rodents that could carry the Monkey Pox virus is banned.

19 June - European Parliament adopts opinions on Commission's proposals for a Directive on additives in animal nutrition and zoonoses package in second reading.



■ Consumer services

Consumer services cover a wide variety of categories including financial services, telecommunications, health services, travel and tourism, organised leisure activities, cultural events, etc. The service sector accounts for a significant share of economic activity in the EU: 70% of Gross Added Value, 69% of total employment and €710 billion of cross border trade. Some services, such as banking and insurance, are primarily of an economic interest to consumers. Other services involve risks to their health and physical safety. For example, injuries can be caused by a lack of information prior to engaging in sports activities, or by poor supervision of organised adventure and leisure activities.

■ EEJ Network: helping consumers

The 10-11 June conference heard that the EEJ-Net model of cross-border redress seems to be working. 2182 complaints have been dealt with between 16 October 2001 and March 2003, with a sharp increase (100%) in the number of complaints dealt with by the Clearing Houses in the past 6 months.

The outcome of the conference, together with data presented there, will form the basis of a full report. This report will, in particular, look at the development of an on-line complaint handling system, development of new ADR bodies, the extension of the network to new Member States and the synergies between the EEJ-Net and the European Consumer Centres network. It will be presented to the Council and the European Parliament by the end of the year.

⇒ News in brief: Consumer affairs

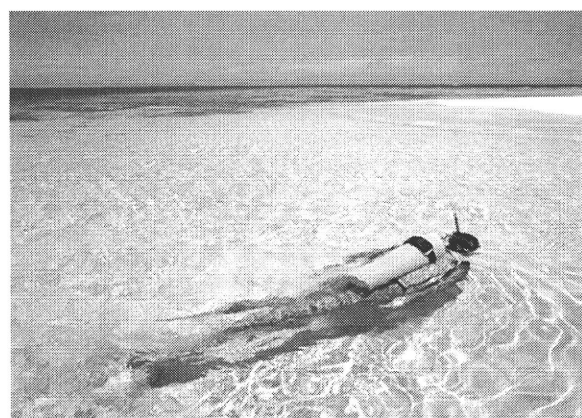
18 June - European Commission adopts a proposal for a Directive on unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices.

Coming soon: a Consumer Voice 'Special' on Unfair Commercial Practices.

Consequently, in a number of service sectors, there is not enough quantitative data available to carry out a proper risk assessment, to compare risk levels in different countries, or to identify gaps and weaknesses in the existing national consumer protection framework. The report therefore suggests the introduction of a legislative framework aimed at monitoring and supporting national consumer policies on safety of services. The tools foreseen are a procedure to enable exchange of information, provisions on systematic collection and assessment of data on risks, and procedures for setting European standards if the evidence indicates that this is necessary. The report will now be debated in the Council and the European Parliament. The Commission plans to propose concrete initiatives on the safety of services based on the outcome of these debates. A new consultation will be launched soon to discuss practical/methodological aspects and to identify priorities.

Further information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/cons_safe/serv_safe/index_en.htm



© Eureka Slide

The safety of consumer services offered cross border, typically in the tourism sector, is of particular importance for the EU. Increasingly, consumers engage in sports and leisure activities in the context of travel and accommodation services.

European Extra-Judicial Network review

On 10-11 June, the European Extra-Judicial Network (EEJ-Net) Conference was held in Brussels to review the achievements of the network since it became operational in 2001 and to discuss the future of alternative dispute resolution schemes (ADR) in dealing with cross-border disputes in the European Union.

The EEJ-Net is a network of ADR "Clearing Houses" in the 15 EU Member States plus Norway and Iceland. ADR schemes, such as ombudsmen or complaints procedures, can help make cross-border redress quicker and cheaper.

Each Clearing House has an overview of ADR schemes in their country and can signpost consumers from other Member States to appropriate schemes. By working together as a network, the Clearing Houses can ensure consumers are given the information they need in a language they can understand and provide language support to help them introduce their complaint.

Further information about the European Commission's support for EEJ-Net at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/redress/out_of_court/eej_net/index_en.htm

Information about the European Commission's policies on ADR at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/redress/out_of_court/index_en.htm

Consumer Voice, June 2003 edition.
The views expressed in Consumer Voice do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission.
Reproduction of articles is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided that the source is mentioned.
E-mail: sanco-newsletter@cec.eu.int

Chief Editor: Marie-Paule Benassi,
Editors: Iwona Pajak, Terese van Oel, Ben Duncan, in co-operation with the EC Health and Consumer Protection DG.
Layout: Deborah MacRate-Ockerman
Website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/health_consumer/library/pub/index_en.html