



Health & Consumer Voice

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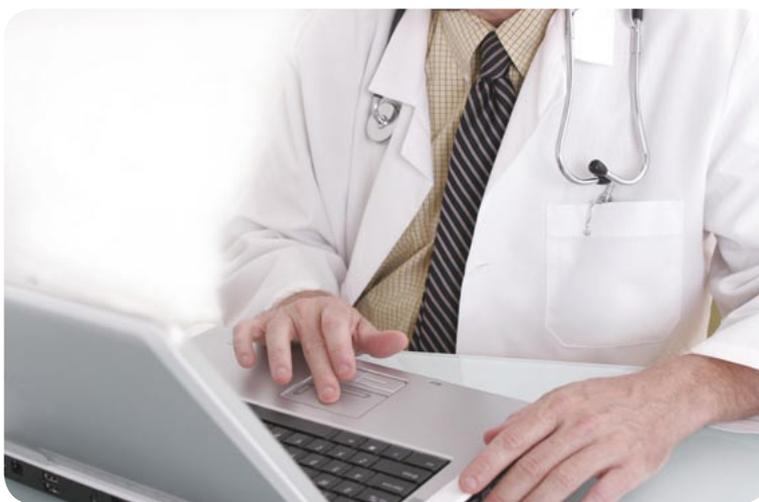
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European Commission wins award for EU Health Portal

The European Information Association (EIA) has presented its 2006 Award for European Information Sources (Electronic Category) to the European Commission for the Health EU Portal. The award is handed out in recognition of excellence in the provision of EU information and through it the EIA also recognises the EU Health Portal as the best of a large number of electronic publications.

Further information :
http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/news/award/award_en.htm

Consultation backs EU action on health services



European Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou presented the results of the recent consultation on health services to the Informal Health Council in Aachen, Germany on 20 April. The results show that most contributors favour some form of EU action on health services, combining both legislative elements and practical support for cooperation between European health systems.

Contributors saw a need for better information to patients to enable informed choices about cross-border care and greater clarity about the procedures to follow, with a broad consensus that quality and safety of healthcare should be ensured by the country where treatment is provided.

Key results from the responses to the consultation include:

- The scale of cross-border healthcare represents about 1% of total healthcare expenses. It is larger for instance in border regions

and in areas with high numbers of visitors from abroad. It is expected to grow;

- Greater clarity is needed over limits of cross-border healthcare under EU law, in particular it should be clearer when prior authorisation may be required or refused;
- Many contributors advocated European support to improve quality and safety in healthcare, such as through developing guidelines and indicators. Other suggestions included developing systems for exchanging patient data between countries and Europe-wide prescriptions;
- Suggestions for practical European support to national health systems included European networks of centres of reference; better sharing of healthcare innovations; and support for health investment through the structural funds.

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Regarding the possibility of adopting legislation in this field, opinions were divided, with the two main options being to include any changes within the existing regulations on the coordination of social security systems, while other contributors preferred a new specific directive on health services in order to also tackle issues falling outside the scope of these regulations.

The Commission launched a public consultation on 26 September 2006

regarding EU action on health services. Over 270 responses were received from national governments, regional authorities, international and national umbrella organisations, social security institutions, universities, industry and individual citizens. The report issued at the Informal Council represents the Commission's summary of these responses. The Commission intends to bring forward proposals for EU action on health services toward the end of 2007.

The summary report and all individual responses to the consultation regarding "Community action on health services" are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/mobility/results_open_consultation_en.htm.

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/mobility/news_en.htm

Commission publishes 2006 Annual Report on dangerous consumer products

The Commission published its annual RAPEX Report on dangerous consumer products on 19 April. The report shows that improved EU-wide cooperation between customs authorities has led to an increase in the number of dangerous consumer products - from teddy bears to hairdryers, cleaning sprays, mini-motorbikes, cigarette lighters and ski boot bindings – being removed from the EU market.

In 2006, toys took over from electrical appliances as the product category most often notified and China was indicated as the country of origin in almost half of all cases notified (440 notifications, 48% of the total).

In total, restrictive measures concerning 924 dangerous products were reported through RAPEX last year, compared to 701 in 2005 - representing a 32% increase.

Through RAPEX, the EU Rapid Alert System for non-food consumer products, national authorities notify the Commission of products presenting a serious risk for the health and safety of consumers, with the exception of food, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. This information is rapidly shared among all other surveillance authorities in 30 European countries, and dangerous products

are then banned or their sale is restricted on the market. The Commission is calling for enhanced participation from all EU Member States, joint efforts with and between national market surveillance and customs authorities, and co-operation with third countries to further increase the effectiveness of the system.

Toys, electrical appliances and motor vehicles alone accounted for more than half of the notifications in 2006. This is in line with the previous year's results. The main difference is that for the first time, toys took over from electrical appliances as the product category most often notified.

The People's Republic of China was indicated as the country of origin of the notified product in almost half of all cases (440 notifications, 48%). To address this, the Commission has intensified its cooperation on product safety with China. Given the fact that China has rapidly become one of the biggest exporters of consumer products to Europe, in 2006 the Commission signed a Memorandum



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of Understanding and a Roadmap for safer toys with the Chinese authorities, to improve the safety of incoming products.

The RAPEX Report 2006 is available in English, French and German at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/rapex>

Europe's windows on the world: ports and product safety

Are products entering the EU safe for consumers? Who is making sure that dangerous goods do not get into the marketplace? On 23 April, European Consumer Protection Commissioner Meglena Kuneva visited the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (*Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit*) and its laboratory in Zwijndrecht, as well as the port of Rotterdam.



Meglena Kuneva, in the centre, and Bert Wiersema of the Dutch customs during the Commissioner's visit to Rotterdam

The focus of the Commissioner's visit was to stress the importance of ports in protecting EU consumers from dangerous goods. Some 90% of all products entering Europe come in via ports, and it is therefore crucial that any unsafe products are identified immediately upon arrival and before they are distributed to the marketplace.

During her visit, Mrs Kuneva highlighted the relationship between ports and product safety, outlined the forth-

coming EU strategy in this area, and stressed the importance of stepping up efforts to stop dangerous goods at ports.

Rotterdam is Europe's main port for both incoming and outgoing trade, handling some 377 million tonnes of goods last year alone. Once a cargo has been cleared, there is freedom of movement for these goods anywhere

within the EU. A high level of vigilance, pooled resources and intelligence gathering between authorities in EU Member States is therefore necessary to help reduce the number of dangerous products arriving on the market and putting EU consumers at risk.

The Commission will over the next year pay particular attention to activities that will facilitate cooperation between customs and market surveillance authorities, including specific product safety training for customs officials, assisting the exchange of information on dangerous products, such as lighters, and amending the legislation governing practical co-operation.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_safe/prod_safe/gpsd/index_en.htm

Sales and Guarantees - Commission assesses Member States' records

On 24 April, the European Commission adopted a Communication that sets out how the Directive on certain aspects of the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees (1999/44/EC) has been implemented in the Member States. The Communication includes an analysis of the case for introducing direct liability for producers.

The Directive on sales and guarantees aims to harmonise those parts of consumer sales law that concern legal guarantees and, to a lesser extent, commercial guarantees (warranties). Its main purpose is to ensure that sellers must guarantee the conformity of their goods with a contract for two years after the delivery of the goods, (i.e. if the product does not work, the consumer may return it within two years). If the goods do not conform to the sales contract, consumers can

claim remedies against the seller (repair, replacement, reduction in price or termination of contract).

All EU Member States have introduced national laws transposing the requirements of the Directive. However, in some areas there are significant differences between Member States, since the Directive sets out minimum standards.

In addition, the Communication examines the case for introducing the direct liability of producers. Such liability would allow consumers to turn directly to the producer of the goods in case of a defect. The current Directive only regulates the liability of sellers. The Communication concludes that currently there is not enough evidence to determine whether the lack of EU rules on direct producers' liability has

a negative effect on consumer confidence in the internal market.

The issue of direct producers' liability is also addressed in a consultation (Green Paper) launched by the Commission in February (COM(2006) 744 final).

This Green Paper deals with a number of cross-cutting issues of relevance for EU consumer legislation as a whole. The consultation is open until 15 May 2007.

The Green Paper is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/acquis/index_en.htm

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/guarantees/index_en.htm

Commission grants €2.5 million to WHO for seven projects under Public Health Programme

The European Commission and the World Health Organisation (WHO) signed contracts on 28 March for seven new joint projects worth a total of €4,242,963, 60% of which is funded by the Commission's Public Health Programme.

The contracts cover EU health policy priorities on environment and health, injuries, equity in health, health security, health services, alcohol and emergency services.

The projects will be implemented by WHO Europe over the next three years.

The seven projects will aim to benefit EU citizens by advancing health policy knowledge in important areas, including alcohol-related harm, injury prevention and disparities in health systems performance. They will also benefit non-EU citizens by assessing health crisis preparedness plans in neighbouring countries.

With contributions totalling \$102million (over €75million) in 2006, the Commission is the third largest extra-budgetary contributor to WHO.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_international/int_organisations/who_en.htm

<http://www.who.int/bfi/ExtraBud/acg060b.pdf>

Better Training for Safer Food workshops

EU training on controlling food hazards

The European Commission launched the first workshop of 2007 on Hazard Analyses and Critical Control Point (HACCP), within the Better Training for Safer Food initiative on 16 April.

This first workshop took place from 16-20 April in Stratford-upon-Avon (UK). The second course will take place from 21-25 May in Porto, Portugal. Course 1 deals with implementation and maintenance of HACCP-based procedures. Course 2 focuses on conducting audits to verify HACCP implementation by business operators. Participants are mainly Member State and candidate country competent authority staff responsible for ensuring food and feed businesses respect EU safety standards.

Controls at airport Border Inspection Posts

On 10-13 April, the first EU-based training workshop dealing with veterinary checks at airport Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) was held at Vienna airport.

The training aims to raise participants'

awareness of best practices for veterinary controls, thereby fostering implementation of standards across the EU.

The training sessions are open to staff from competent authorities carrying out such controls in the EU and candidate countries. Further workshops will also take place in Vienna on 19-22 June and 18-21 September.

'Better Training for Safer Food' is a comprehensive EU training scheme aiming to improve the safety of food in Europe. 2007 is its second year of implementation. The scheme focuses on the areas of food law, feed law, animal health and animal welfare rules, as well as plant health rules.

The main objective of the initiative is the organisation and development of a Community training strategy with a view to:

- Ensuring and maintaining a high level of consumer protection and of animal health, animal welfare and plant health;
- Promoting a harmonised approach to the operation of Community and national control systems;
- Creating an equal level playing-field for all food businesses;

- Enhancing trade of safe food;
- Ensuring fair trade with third countries and in particular developing countries.

Further information http://ec.europa.eu/food/training/index_en.htm

In brief

Commission takes action against Greece over ban on certain animal imports

On 28 March, the Commission sent a Letter of Formal Notice to Greece for imposing a national ban on imports of fattening lambs and kids (small goats) from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, and from all third countries. As intra-EU trade and rules for imports of animals and animal products are harmonised, such unilateral bans are contrary to EU law.



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