



Health & Consumer Voice

June 2007

Headline News

EU increases protection for Timeshare holidays with a new Directive _____ 1

Top Stories

Council of Ministers adopts Regulation for European Small Claims Procedure _____ 2

Commissioner Kuneva opens Berlin conference for more effective European consumer protection _____ 2

Commissioner Kyprianou's call to action: a Forum to battle alcohol-related harm _____ 3

EU requests scientific opinion on potential health risks posed by personal music players and mobile phones _____ 3

EU Health Strategy: consultation shows support for increased EU cooperation _____ 4

Europeans concerned about potential health risks of Electromagnetic Fields _____ 4

Scientific committee in favour of further research on possible indoor pollutants _____ 4

'Better Training for Safer Food': plan protection training workshop _____ 4

In brief

Online Shopping: removing barriers to cross-border purchases _____ 2

Fire risk campaign: a step closer to protecting children _____ 2

RAPEX report _____ 2

EU highlights health and environment progress at Midterm Review in Vienna _____ 3

Parliament supports the trade ban on cat and dog fur in the EU _____ 3

Newsletter of the European Commission Scientific Committees _____ 3

EU increases protection for Timeshare holidays with a new Directive

Consumers across the EU will benefit from stricter legislation on timeshare, with a new Directive proposal adopted on 7 June (COM (2007) 303 final). It aims at bridging the gaps of the previous regulation which could leave consumers open to several risks and scams.



The 1994 EU Timeshare Directive (94/47/EC) gives consumers the basic right to clear information, a ban on deposits and the right to withdraw and change their mind. The new proposal will close the loopholes in the current rules. The scope of the products will be extended to cover new products such as discount holiday clubs, timeshare-like holidays on cruise boats, canal boats and caravans, in addition to other areas such as timeshare resale and exchange.

The new rules should ensure that consumers are equally well protected across the EU and will create a level playing-field in the market for timeshare and other holiday-related products.

What is Timeshare?

Timeshare is the right to spend a period of time (i.e. one or more weeks) in a holiday property for a specified period of the year or longer. Timeshare holidays are extremely popular in many EU countries, with the UK, Sweden and Germany having the highest number of consumers buying timeshare holidays, often located in Spain and Italy.

The timeshare industry is worth over €10.5 billion and is responsible for more than 40 000 jobs across the EU.

Further information:

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

Call for expression of interest - Stakeholder Dialogue Group

A call for expression of interest is taking part in the Stakeholder Dialogue Group of DG SANCO will close on 31 July 2007. Membership will be on a personal basis and will change over time. Participants will be selected on the basis of their overall working experience in the field of DG SANCO consultation processes.

The primary task of the Stakeholder Dialogue Group will be to ensure that DG SANCO stakeholder involvement processes are better tailored to stakeholders' needs, and to support mainstreaming best practice in DG SANCO's consultations.

For further information, please visit: <http://www.sanco-stakeholderinvolvement.eu/>



In brief



Online Shopping: removing barriers to cross-border purchases

In a report disclosed on 21 June, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Zuzana Roithová, Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Internal Market and Consumer Protection, discussed the increase of use of the internet in cross-border transactions, consumer confidence in online shopping and prevention of the fragmentation of the Internal Market in the digital environment.

According to a Eurobarometer survey, only 25% of citizens use online services and only 6% have made cross-border purchases via the internet. MEP Roithová highlighted how under the present legislation there is no proper protection for consumers, with a call to action directed at the Commission requesting new draft legislation.

Further information: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/e-commerce/index_en.htm

Fire risk campaign: a step closer to protecting children

On 21 June, Members of the European Parliament and officials pledged to work for new international rules to outlaw the sale of children's night clothes posing a fire hazard. A 'Protect Our Children' campaign was launched in the UK following a case where a child's pyjamas caught fire.

The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) has recently published a standard for children's nightwear, setting minimum requirements to prevent these occurrences.

Consumer Protection Commissioner Meglena Kuneva and MEP Stephen Hughes said the focus of the campaign should now encourage Member States to sign up to change the law.

RAPEX report

RAPEX is the EU rapid alert system for all dangerous consumer products, with the exception of food, pharmaceutical and medical devices.

On 22 June, the longest RAPEX report to date was filed - with 44 potentially dangerous items being reported to EU authorities.

Further information: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex_archives_en.cfm

Council of Ministers adopts Regulation for European Small Claims Procedure

On 13 June, the Council of Ministers adopted a common position establishing a European Small Claims Procedure.

The regulation simplifies, speeds up and reduces the cost of court procedures for small claims and establishes the European Small Claims Procedure, giving citizens an alternative to current legal procedures of EU Member States.

The procedure will apply to civil and commercial matters where the claim

does not exceed €2,000 both in pecuniary and non-pecuniary cases. The common position introduces procedural modifications with respect to the proposal of 15 March 2005, as the use of standard forms and time limits to speed up litigation.

Lastly, the judgment shall be recognized and enforced in another Member State automatically without any possibility of questioning its legitimacy. The new procedure will apply from 1 January 2009.

Commissioner Kuneva opens Berlin conference for more effective European consumer protection



On 14 and 15 June, the European Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Mrs Meglena Kuneva, attended consumer protection events organized by the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) in Berlin, highlighting the benefits of cross-border consumer protection.

The first day featured a meeting with the ECC-Net and the Consumer Protection Co-operation network (CPC), whilst the second day was an opportunity for the public to ask a series of questions on cross-border consumer protection issues to EC representatives assembled in a «village» around the Brandenburg Gate.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress/ecc_network/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/publications/factsheet-ECC-Net_en.pdf

Commissioner Kyprianou's call to action: a Forum to battle alcohol-related harm

On 7 June, EU Health Commissioner, Markos Kyprianou, representatives of industry and NGOs signed a Charter establishing the Alcohol and Health Forum. The Forum is intended to meet twice a year, focusing on actions to protect children and young people, preventing irresponsible commercial alcohol communications and sales.

Harmful alcohol consumption is estimated to be responsible for approximately 195 000 deaths a year in the EU¹ due to accidents, liver disease, cancers, etc. It is the net cause of 7.4% of all ill-health and early death in the EU, and has a negative impact on labour and productivity. Young people in the EU are particularly at risk, as over 10% of female mortality, and around 25% of male mortality, in the 15-29 year age group is related to hazardous alcohol consumption.

Platform for action

The European Alcohol and Health Forum is a common platform for action,

¹ Adapted from WHO's *Global Burden of Disease Study* (Rehm et al 2004), *Alcohol in Europe*, Anderson P, Baumberg B, Institute of Alcohol Studies, UK, June 2006.

chaired by the European Commission's Health and Consumer Protection DG, with a Science Group to provide advice and guidance on issues under discussion.



The Forum is part of a process which started on 24 October 2006, when the Commission adopted a Communication setting out an EU strategy to support Member States to reduce alcohol-related harm. The Charter establishing the European Health Forum is an important element of this action.

For further information on the Charter establishing the European Alcohol Health Forum, please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_charter_en.htm

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_com_en.htm

EU requests scientific opinion on potential health risks posed by personal music players and mobile phones

Two Directorates-General of the European Commission (DGs *Health and Consumer Protection* and *Enterprise and Industry*) have asked the EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) to assess the potential risks of loss of hearing caused by devices such as personal music players and mobile phones with music.

The regulatory framework regulating the safety of this equipment includes:



Directive 1999/5/EC on health and safety aspects of radio equipment and mobile phones; the Low Voltage Directive 2006/95/EC on health and safety aspects of electrical equipment operating within certain voltage ranges; and the General Product Safety Directive 2001/95/EC ensuring consumer product safety.

The Committee will assess whether exposure to noise from personal music players can pose a threat to health. In the case that it does, the Committee will identify the exposure levels of noise emission that offer citizens sufficient protection.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenih_r_q_011.pdf

In brief



EU highlights health and environment progress at Midterm Review in Vienna

On 13 June, the Intergovernmental Midterm Review Conference on Environment and Health opened in Vienna. European Commission representatives, Health and Environment Ministers, NGOs and other stakeholders gathered to discuss and assess progress in health and environmental policies in view of the 5th Ministerial Conference in 2009.

The EU Health & Consumer Protection DG's Director for Health, Mr Andrzej Ryś, highlighted the need to integrate health in all policies and to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable groups. With this in mind, the Commission is planning a Communication on the consequences of climate change on human and animal health, which is expected to be adopted in 2008.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/environment/environment_en.htm

Parliament supports the trade ban on cat and dog fur in the EU

On 18 June, the EU Commissioner for Health, Mr Markos Kyprianou, held a speech at the plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg advocating support for the Commission's proposal to ban the trade of cat and dog fur in the EU.

The regulation (2006/0236/COD) was approved by the European Parliament on 19 June and will apply from 31 December 2008.

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

Newsletter of the European Commission Scientific Committees

This new, electronic newsletter is part of the Health and Consumer Protection DG's proactive communication policy on scientific advice. The newsletter aims to inform, as well as stimulate, dialogue with scientists and stakeholders on the important themes studied by the three scientific committees: SCCP (Scientific Committee on Consumer Products); SCHER (Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks); and SCENIHR (Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks). Publication will be three times per year in January, May and September.

Following the two initial issues, a confirmation of subscription to the newsletter will be necessary to continue receiving the publication.

Further information: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/newsletters_risk_en.htm

EU Health Strategy: consultation shows support for increased EU cooperation

On 1 June, the Commission published a report on the consultation of the forthcoming EU Health Strategy, summing up more than 150 responses received. The strategy is an attempt to rise to the challenges Europe will be facing in the coming years, setting broad objectives for the next decade.

EU Health Priorities

The report highlighted key issues: inequalities, such as gender aspects, and work on quality and safety in health-care in relation to cross-border issues, nutrition, physical activity, smoking, and mental health. The importance of health-related research and e-health was also highlighted.

Global Health Issues

Respondents showed their support for the inclusion of an international dimension in the strategy, reaching broad aspects of health. They underlined the importance of cooperation and interaction between the EU and other international organizations, such as the World Health Organiza-

tion (WHO), as a way to develop international regulatory frameworks and new initiatives.

Implementing the Strategy

There was a call for the creation of a new system using the tools of the "Open Method of Coordination" with EU Member States, as in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy, to foster cooperation among Member States.

The importance of engaging stakeholders was also highlighted with respondents calling for more clarity on the structure and objectives of current health stakeholder groups working with the European Commission.



Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/strategy/results_consultation_en.htm

Europeans concerned about potential health risks of Electromagnetic Fields

The Special Eurobarometer on Electromagnetic Fields (EMF), published on 12 June, reveals that most EU citizens do not feel they are adequately protected by authorities against the potential health risks posed by EMF.

More than two-thirds of people interviewed said they were not satisfied with the information on EMF, while one third felt they are not informed at all.

The European Commission has been monitoring the potential health threats

related to EMF with a Recommendation from the Council (1999/519/EC) establishing a Community framework for basic restrictions and reference levels. The European recommendation serves as a basis but the implementation of protection measures is a matter for national authorities to address.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_272a_en.pdf

Scientific committee in favour of further research on possible indoor pollutants

According to an EU scientific committee there is need for research on possible indoor air pollutants, such as chemicals for intended use, unintentional emissions, radon, particles, microbes, pets and pests, etc. The Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER) provided a comprehensive examination of the types of potential health risks that can be anticipated in several indoor environments.

The opinion published on 13 June, suggests that the health risk assessments of pollutants in indoor environments should be carried out according to standard principles of chemical risk assessment in the EU and recommends addressing in particular the most vulnerable groups (such as children, pregnant women, the elderly, asthma patients or those having other respiratory pathologies), by applying a case by case approach.

For further information, please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scher/docs/scher_o_055.pdf

'Better Training for Safer Food': plant protection training workshop

From 18-22 June, the Commission held a training workshop on plant protection products in Bratislava (Slovakia).

The workshop, which falls under the 'Better training for Safer Food' initiative, provided training for 35 national authority officials involved in evaluation and registration of plant protection products.

The aim of the course is to improve the participants' understanding of the re-registration process for plant protection products. A follow-up to discuss cases arising from the workshop proposals is scheduled from 10-12 September 2007.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/training/news_en.htm



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http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm