



# Health & Consumer Voice

September 2007

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## Commission carries out two-month analysis of toy safety controls

Following the recent Chinese toy safety confidence crisis and the *Mattel* toy recalls, the EU Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Mrs. Meglena Kuneva, announced at a meeting of the European Parliament's Committee for Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) on 12 September, the launch of a two-month stocktaking exercise. This will use the case study of toy safety to review the strengths and weaknesses of the consumer product safety mechanism in place in the EU. As part of the review process, the Commissioner met twice with *Mattel* executives.



The main message highlighted by the Commissioner is that there will be no compromise on the safety of consumers particularly when it comes to child safety. In the next two months the Commission will take all necessary action to ensure that the system in place is working as it should.

Three large scale toy recalls by *Mattel* took place on 3 & 15 August and on 4 September. Information on these was immediately disseminated to the national enforcement authorities of all Member States via RAPEX (the European Rapid Alert System for non-food, dangerous consumer products). The European Commission requested national authorities to closely monitor these recalls and to provide information on the recall success rates in each country. They were also asked to extend their investigations beyond the items identified by the manufac-

turers in the various toy recalls with lead in paint and magnets. The Commission has underlined that it plans to discuss the conclusions drawn with the Member States at the next meeting of the General Product Safety Committee. This discussion will help the Commission to identify the preventive actions that these risks require.

In her recent visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in July, Commissioner Kuneva made it clear that it is in the interest of both countries to build a strong co-operation and to expand and improve the EU-China product safety monitoring system. According to the latest RAPEX report, in 2006 most notifications concerned toys (24%), and overall the

*(continued page 2)*



## In brief



### Commissioner Kuneva tells MEPs not to water down safety rules

On 12 September, the EU Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Mrs. Meglena Kuneva, in a speech at the European Parliament in Brussels, highlighted the need for the Review on the Approach Package not to support measures that would water down the existing surveillance regime on product safety.

The Commissioner advocated open markets and fair competition, reiterating however that there can be no compromise on safety and the need to ensure that there are no gaps in the consumer safety policy.

### Health-EU Portal issues a multilingual newsletter

The month of September marked the launch of a multilingual newsletter on the Health-EU Portal, aimed at better informing European citizens on issues in the field of health, at both European and international level.

The newsletter, an electronic publication produced twice per month, is published in 20 European languages, with links to interactive features on public health. It aims to update citizens on health-related events, conferences, campaigns while each edition is dedicated to a European or international day of action in the field of health.

To receive the newsletter, please register at the following address :

[http://health.europa.eu/newsletter/1/newsletter\\_en.htm](http://health.europa.eu/newsletter/1/newsletter_en.htm)

### New Eurobarometer survey reveals Europeans more interested in health issues than in international and social news

A survey released on 17 September shows European citizens in most Member States follow closely issues related to health, science and technology, with 71% of Europeans being interested in health issues. The interest for these areas is higher than for international news and economic and social affairs (only 68%). The survey also reveals that Europeans trust the scientific and medical professions above all others when it comes to information on science or health research. Significantly, international institutions, including the European Union itself, are perceived as more trustworthy than regional and national governmental sources.

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

PRC was the country of origin in almost half the cases (48%). However, RAPEX figures do not fully reflect the level of non-compliance with safety requirements, since the degree of control varies between Member States and is based on sample checks.

As laid out in the General Product Safety Directive (2001/95/EC), it is the responsibility of the economic operators to ensure products on the market are safe. In January 2006, the Commission and the Chinese government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the objective of establishing better communication and collaboration on consumer product safety. One measure, taken in May 2006, is that RAPEX information concerning Chinese products be shared

with Chinese authorities allowing for immediate follow-up on their part. In addition to the general framework, a specific 'Roadmap' for safer toys was signed in September 2006. This agreement aims at ensuring that toys exported by China to the EU are safe and outlines a strategy for improving the safety of toys manufactured there, such as training and practical assistance, exchanges of RAPEX information, etc. It also contains a commitment on the part of the Chinese authorities to strengthen inspection and supervision of toys exported to Europe.

#### Further information

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex\\_archives\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex_archives_en.cfm)

## Preventive medical check-ups: Europeans well aware of most of them

**On 14 September, the Eurobarometer survey on 'Health in the European Union' revealed that European citizens seem to be aware, overall, of the importance of preventive medical checkups, but are still infrequently having certain tests, especially colorectal cancer screening, which only concerns 8% of Europeans.**

**The survey which was released for the European Prostate Awareness Day, indicates that only 13% of European men took the Prostate Specific Antigen Tests and only 8% of all respondents the colorectal test.**

The survey showed Europeans are aware of the importance of preventive check-ups, with more than six out of ten citizens carrying out dental tests and four out of ten taking eye-tests each year. A majority of EU citizens considers itself to be in good health, with only 7% assessing their health as poor or very poor.

However, there is still evidence of health inequalities, with twice as

many of the least educated group (14%) saying they are in poor health condition.

Furthermore, the survey also examined the issue of women's health. Here, there are encouraging signs of a high take-up rate for testing; for example, 43% of women underwent a manual breast examination.

In this group as well, health inequalities were present with testing being more frequent amongst the better educated and employed women.

About three in every ten Europeans (29%) have a long-standing illness or health problem. However the trend is not the same in all countries.

#### Further information

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_publication/eurobarometers\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_publication/eurobarometers_en.htm)

## New EU Animal Health Policy: 'Prevention is better than Cure'

On 19 September, the European Commission adopted a Communication setting out the European Union's animal health strategy for 2007-13.

The document outlines the framework for animal health measures over the next 6 years, taking into account the feedback from stakeholders and potential challenges in the future. The aim is to draw attention to precautionary measures, disease surveillance, controls and research with a view to limit the incidence of animal disease and minimize the impact of outbreaks when they take place. The document also highlights the need for an integrated approach in animal health policy-making, relating it to other EU policies.

Animal disease outbreaks, such as the Foot and Mouth disease crisis in 2001, can have strong consequences on the economy, social structures, trade, animal welfare and the environment.

Over recent years, both at EU and at Member State level, there has been an enhanced pre-emptive approach to animal health threats, implementing strict monitoring, surveillance and bio-security measures against certain diseases, with positive results.

The objective is to reduce outbreaks of diseases and the high costs associated with these with respect to pre-



ventive measures. The EU will also improve communication and cooperation with its trading partners in order to boost their understanding of EU rules and standards, and to allow for timely warnings when problems arise in products destined for Europe. In addition to this, there is also an effort to promote scientific research and innovation. This will be done by improving the network of national reference laboratories and maximizing expertise and knowledge.

Animal health is an EU policy which overlaps and affects different sectors from the environment, agriculture, fisheries, to trade, research, taxation, external aid and enlargement. It is to this end that the Commission intends to take an integrated approach in its policy-making during the forthcoming years.

**Further information**  
[http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/strategy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/strategy/index_en.htm)

### In brief



**EU technical guidance for chemicals and the need for nano-material-related modifications**

On 8 August, the European Commission published a scientific opinion on the EU Technical Guidance Documents for chemicals with regards to nano-materials. Nanotechnology refers, broadly, to the control of matter on the molecular level in scales smaller than 1 micrometer, normally 1 to 100 nanometers, and the fabrication of devices within that size range. The EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) concluded that it is necessary to modify the existing guidance documents for the risk assessment of chemicals.

A need was identified by the Committee for special characterization of nano-material properties, which could differ considerably from conventional chemicals. In addition, the effects on health and the environment need to be evaluated properly. There is a lack of common rules in place for the toxicology of nano-materials and, for this reason, tests should be carried out on a case-by-case basis. For instance, special consideration is required for implants of nano-particles in humans and other species and related adverse effects, within the cardiovascular system or following passage across the blood. Nano-technologies have the potential to bring considerable benefits to the quality of life of European citizens. The SCENIHR opinion contributed to the further development of regulatory guidance in the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research.

The opinion can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_risk/committee/04\\_scenhir/docs/scenhir\\_o\\_010.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committee/04_scenhir/docs/scenhir_o_010.pdf)

## Foot and Mouth disease outbreak confirmed in the UK

On 3 August, the European Commission was informed by the British veterinary authorities of a confirmed outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) near Guildford in Surrey, England. Several new outbreaks were subsequently confirmed.

This is the first outbreak since the 2001 crisis which affected around

2000 farms across the British countryside and cost the EU emergency veterinary fund alone over 13 billion euro.

All measures foreseen by EU legislation on FMD were applied, including culling of all animals and establishing a Protection Zone of a radius of three kilometers and a Surveillance Zone of 10 kilometers around the premis-

es. Furthermore, a ban on movement for ruminants and pigs was imposed across Great Britain.

Following the initial outbreak, a second one was reported on 7 August, within the already established protection zone in Surrey and, on 12 September, a third outbreak was reported

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in Surrey, about 50 km north of the outbreaks previously identified.

The UK delegation updated the European Commission and Member States before the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health as regards the measures taken in response to the outbreak. In keeping with the measures foreseen in the Foot and Mouth Directive (FMD 2003/85/EC), all animals on the infected holding were culled and a 3 km protection zone and 10 km surveillance zone was established around the premises. The Standing Committee adopted an emergency decision confirming these

measures and extending the categorization of Great Britain as a high risk area until 15 October, subject to review. This means that live animals susceptible to FMD cannot be dispatched from Great Britain, nor can their products. Likewise, no live animals can be sent to Great Britain from other Member States.

The European Commission remains in close contact with the UK authorities to monitor the development of this outbreak.

**Further information**

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/fmd\\_uk\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/fmd_uk_en.htm)



## Commission and UEFA kick off football season with a TV campaign: 'Go on, get out of your armchair!'

**The European Commission and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) launched a joint TV campaign to encourage European citizens to engage in physical activity as part of their daily routine. The advert aims to motivate users to get out of their armchairs and be physically active, using the slogan 'Go on, get out of your armchair'. Millions of Europeans are expected to view this advert during the half-time break of this season's televised Champions League football games.**

The initiative comes at a time when poor diets and low levels of physical activity in Europe are the leading factor for six out of seven of the main health threats in Europe.



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The lack of physical exercise, together with unbalanced diets, is responsible for a sharp rise in obesity in the European population, with more than half the adult population being overweight or obese. Another worrisome figure is the 22 million children rated as overweight. Sadly, the number of overweight or obese children is growing at a rate of 400 000 new cases registered every year.

The 30 second advert is expected to reach between 80 and 100 million viewers each week during the match season of the Champions League. It will be aired free of charge in more than 40 European countries during the interval of the football games.

The advert is the result of a joint co-operation with UEFA, which is offering 30 seconds of airtime that it devotes to social initiatives.

**Further information**

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/nutrition/nutrition\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/nutrition/nutrition_en.htm)

## In brief



### Training for South-East Asian laboratory analysts on food testing methods

On 3-7 September, a training workshop on the detection of heavy metals in foodstuffs took place at the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Reference Laboratory (ARL) at Nonthaburi, Thailand. The workshop was aimed at ASEAN member state laboratory staff and is part of the Health and Consumer Protection DG's 'Better Training for Safer Food' initiative.

The training intends to help ASEAN countries improve their scientific competence of official testing services, strengthen technical capacities and disseminate new working methods at national level. A large part of the workshop was dedicated to practical sessions on a range of methods of analysis and detection including: EU regulations, validation requirements for analysis methods, quality control, data handling and measurement of uncertainty.

For further information on the 'Better Training for Safer Food' programme, please visit:

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/training/docs2007/asean\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/training/docs2007/asean_en.htm)



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Chief Editor: Marie-Paule Benassi.

Editors: Gaja Pellegrini-Bettoli, Fabio Fabbi, in cooperation with the EC Health and Consumer Protection DG.

Layout: Deborah MacRate-Ockerman

Email: [sanco-newsletter@ec.europa.eu](mailto:sanco-newsletter@ec.europa.eu)

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