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Second Consumer Markets Scoreboard now available

In 2008, the Commission proposed to establish an annual Consumer Markets Scoreboard to monitor the performance of markets in terms of economic and social outcomes for consumers. The Consumer Markets Scoreboard is a tool to identify where the internal market is not functioning well for consumers and where intervention may be needed.

The second edition of the Scoreboard finds that consumers are less satisfied and experience more problems with services than with goods markets. It also finds that consumers empowered by switching help to improve the outcomes for all consumers since consumers are less likely to report price increases in markets with higher switching rates.

As follow-up, the Commission will collaborate with national stakeholders to gather more quality data to develop a solid consumer evidence base. In particular, it will encourage regular collection of average prices of comparable products and develop a harmonised methodology to classify consumer complaints.

The Scoreboard looks at five top-level indicators – complaints, prices, satisfaction, switching and safety – to identify malfunctioning consumer markets that need further analysis. In sectors identified as not working for consumers, in-depth market specific analyses will be carried out addressing the reasons behind failure and suggesting appropriate policy



measures. The Scoreboard will also track progress in retail market integration and benchmark the national consumer markets and policies.

The Scoreboard initiative is in line with the Single Market Review which addresses the need to be more responsive to the expectations of citizens and pay greater attention to outcomes of policies, and with the EU Consumer Policy Strategy 2007-2013, which strives to empower EU consumers and to put consumer welfare at the heart of well-functioning markets.

Reliable and up-to-date information (quantitative and qualitative) is essential for better policy making. This is a cornerstone of Consumer Policy Strategy. The continuous development of data-gathering is also an important part of the Consumer Policy Strategy and Programme 2007-2013.

The text of the Scoreboard Communication is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/strategy/docs/communication_scoreboard_en.pdf

For further information, please view:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/202&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>



In brief



First EU Health Prize for journalists

On 17 February the European Commission launched the first EU Health Prize for journalists in print and on-line articles. This prize is part of the Europe for Patients campaign and will reward journalists who have contributed to inform citizens on health issues, specifically the initiatives in the Europe for Patients campaign.

Journalists are invited to submit their articles using the on-line entry form on the Europe for Patients website. Articles published in print or on-line publications between 2 July 2008, when the first Europe for Patients initiative was adopted, and 15 June 2009 will be considered.

The selection of the winner will be a two step procedure. First, national juries chaired by the Commission's Representation and composed of 2 health experts and 2 journalists will select a national finalist from each Member State. The second step is choosing the winner and 2 runners up. This is the role of the EU jury, chaired by the European Commission's Director General for Health and Consumers, Mr Robert Madelin.

The 27 finalists will be invited to Brussels in autumn 2009 for a media seminar on EU health issues and a prestigious award ceremony hosted by Commissioner Vassiliou. The first prize will be 5,000 EUR, the second prize 3,000 EUR and the third prize 2,000 EUR.

The Prize will be awarded in the spirit of respect for media freedom and pluralism and in the context of the Commission's desire to improve communication between European Institutions and citizens.

The EU Health Prize for journalists and the Europe for Patients Campaign are funded under the Second Community Health Programme 2008-2013.

To submit an article and find out more, please visit Europe for patients' website:

http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/europe_for_patients/index_en.htm



European Parliament's vote on Animal Feed Regulation

On 5 February the European Parliament adopted in first reading a Regulation to replace the current legislation on marketing and use of feed, both for farm animals and pets, based on a Commission proposal dating back less than one year.

The new legislation considerably simplifies the existing procedures and improves the information farmers and pet owners will get on the feed they buy for their animals.

It will help to promote innovation and competitiveness in the European feed sector and lead to a more integrated single market for feed, by reducing the administrative burden for feed operators.

The European Parliament and the Council have reached agreement very quickly on this key proposal, which represents a major step forward for the simplification and modernisation of existing procedures for labelling and marketing animal feed and pet food.

The new regulation caters for modern marketing conditions and addresses the different information needs of the specific types of feed purchasers, such as qualified farmers, ordinary pet owners and up to date streams of commercialisation such as the internet.

Furthermore, this new legislation establishes a new co-regulation approach which delegates competences in non-safety relevant areas to feed operators, subject to approval by the Commission. By considerably simplifying existing legislation, it reduces administrative burden for all stakeholders.

The text contains provisions on the following main issues:



- Responsibility of the feed business operators;
- Negative list with prohibited substances for feed use;
- Mandatory labelling for feed materials and mixed feed (specific mandatory labelling requirements are laid down for feed materials, compound feed including pet food and "dietetic" feed);
- Creation of a guide to good labelling for farm animal feed and one for pet food in co-regulation;
- Establishment of a Community Catalogue of feed materials in co-regulation.

The regulation transfers the initiative for updating the EU's list of feed materials, specifying the most relevant compounds used in feed, from the legislator to feed operators. Market transparency will be therefore improved, because the list of feed materials will better reflect current formulations and more quickly incorporate innovations.

The Commission welcomes the work done by the European Parliament and the Council as all the key objectives have been maintained in the final text. The new legislation has to be adopted by the Council, and it will enter into force later this year.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/animalnutrition/labelling/index_en.htm

Health risks from personal music players

A conference was hosted by the European Commission in Brussels on 27 January, bringing together EU Member State experts, scientists, industry, consumer organisations, standard makers, MEPs and other stakeholders, to tackle the problem of health risks from personal music players. The purpose was to discuss precautions that users can take, technical solutions that industry could apply to minimise hearing damage, and whether there is a need for further regulation or revision of existing safety standards to better protect consumers.

Last October, an opinion from the EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) found that 5-10% of personal music player listeners risk permanent hearing loss if they listen to a personal music player at high volume settings for more than one hour per day over a period of at least 5 years.

To this regard, the European Commission decided to gather experts around a table in order to tackle such health risks and to look at measures that can be taken to prevent from them.

The one day conference, held on 27 January at the Centre Albert Borschette in Brussels, brought together key stakeholders from all relevant sectors, including representatives from Nokia, Apple, the French Ministry of Health, the UK Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Spanish Confederation of Consumer and Users.

During her keynote speech, EU Consumer Affairs Commissioner Meglena Kuneva expressed the Com-



mission's intention to act quickly, to look again at the controls in place, to make sure they are fully effective and to keep pace with new technology so that consumers benefit from the highest safety standards.

In recent years sales of personal music players have soared, in particular those of MP3 players. Overall, in the EU, it is estimated that roughly 50 to 100 million people may be listening to portable music players on a daily basis.

A European safety standard already exists restricting the noise level of personal music players to 100 dB, but there is increased concern over hearing damage from excessive exposure to such sources. Such damage can be prevented to a large extent by measures such as reducing the noise exposure levels and duration.

The EU Scientific Committee opinion highlighted that users - if they listen for only 5 hours per week at high volume control settings (exceeding 89 decibels) - would exceed the current limits in place for noise allowed in the workplace. Users listening for longer periods risk permanent hearing loss after 5 years. This approximates to 5-10% of the listeners, which may be between 2.5 and 10 million people in the EU.

For more information on the Scientific Committee's Opinion on personal music players, please view:

http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP_08/1492&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

In brief



Workshop on electromagnetic fields and health

On 11-12 February the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers and Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry organised a workshop in Brussels on "EMF and Health: Science and Policy to Address Public Concerns".

The first day was mainly dedicated to presentations describing all the current relevant legislation and product standards at EU level and the conclusions of various assessments of the potential health effects of electromagnetic fields. The actors involved to this extent were: the European Commission, the CENELEC and the SCENIHR (Scientific Committee for Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks). The latest is one of the three independent EU non-food Scientific Committees and it provides scientific advice to the European Commission on issues relating to consumer safety, public health and the environment, such as EMF and other physical hazards, nanotechnologies, medical devices, antimicrobial resistance, and methodologies for risk assessment.

The second day, titled "Positions from the stakeholders", was instead reserved for the presentation of the positions and wishes of the various stakeholders: workers, concerned citizens (groups of hypersensitive people and environment & health NGO), mobile manufacturers and telecom operators. A final debate with the audience has followed.

The aim of this workshop was to discuss and identify the expectations of stakeholders in view of the latest scientific assessments and to generate a constructive dialogue involving services from the European Commission, members of the European Parliament, scientists and other stakeholders. The conclusions of the workshop should ultimately help to orient the policy process.



European Conference on Seed Availability in the 21st Century

On 18 March European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers will host in Brussels the conference "Ensuring Seed Availability in the 21st Century", in order to communicate and discuss the results of the evaluation of the EU legislation on seeds and propagating material (S&PM) and the way forward.

Seed makes food, feed, fibre, flowers and fuel. The objective of the legislation in such field is to ensure the free movement of high-quality seed and plant propagating material (S&PM) of plant varieties that meet the expectations of its users.

Since the first adoption of the legislation in the 1960s, new priorities, such as good agricultural practice, sustainability and protection of the environment - including the protection of genetic diversity and food safety - have come to the fore. Equally, new breeding techniques have been developed and the structure of S&PM has changed, developing into a global business.



The implementation of the legislation and its robustness with regard to potential new challenges, as well as its relevance and utility, were evaluated by an external consultant in 2007-2008 with a view to paving the way for revision of the legislation. The purpose of such conference is to communicate and discuss the results of the evaluation of the Community legislation on the marketing of seeds and plant propagation material and the way forward, and to have a clear view on the position of the various stakeholder groups with regard to the recommendations made in this evaluation report.

To read more and to register, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/seed_conf/index_en.htm

Ban on trade in cat and dog fur across the EU now into force

As from January 2009, a comprehensive EU ban on imports, exports and intra-Community trade in cat and dog fur and products containing such fur is into force in the EU.

The European Commission proposed a ban on cat and dog fur in November 2006, due to evidence that cat and dog fur was being placed on the European market, usually undeclared or disguised as synthetic or other types of fur.

The vast majority of cat and dog fur is believed to be imported from third countries, notably China, where the rearing of these animals for their fur

is practiced. Cat and dog fur, found occasionally on the EU market in the past, provoked a strong reaction from EU consumers, who demanded the response of EU Institutions to this regard.

The Commission's proposal for a regulation, adopted in December 2007, assures EU citizens that cat and dog fur will no longer be sold anywhere in the EU through a harmonised approach, by prohibiting all production, marketing and imports and exports of cat and dog fur in the EU.

For further information, please see:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/fur_cats_dogs_en.htm

In brief

Young help for «Help 2.0» campaign

The first phase of the new "help 2.0" campaign has been launched, with the purpose of collecting concrete messages for the next campaign. Young people are invited to tell their experiences and give their tips on "how not to start smoking, to stop smoking or to avoid the dangers of passive smoking". Several partner youth organisations are spreading the news.

The best ones could be used as a base for the future TV spots and Web operations.

Want to participate? Go to the dedicated website:

<http://www.needyourhelp.eu/>

Thematic meeting on healthy environments

On 28-29 January the European Commission Directorate-General for Health and Consumers hosted a meeting in Luxembourg, co-organised with the WHO and the Luxembourg Ministry of Health, to address severe health problems linked to environmental conditions, which affect a large number of people across Europe. The meeting was attended by 170 participants from 42 European countries.

Areas of particular focus included: respiratory diseases that arise from indoor air pollution and inappropriate indoor environments; obesity in children resulting from lack of appropriate urban and spatial planning that promotes increased physical activity in safe and supportive environments; injuries in children arising from unsafe indoor and outdoor environments.

Main conclusions of technical discussion on above areas will be included in the draft Ministerial Declaration, which will be presented at the fifth Ministerial Conference on Health and Environment scheduled in Parma (Italy) in March 2010.



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