



Health & Consumer Voice

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New Director General for Health and Consumers

Paola Testori Coggi has been promoted from 1 April to Director General, leading the health and consumer portfolio in Brussels (and Luxembourg and Grange, Ireland), in succession to Robert Madelin.

Robert has moved on to run the Information Society and Media DG, after 6 years at the helm here.

We wish them both well.



For general information on Health and Consumers DG, please go to:

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

Upcoming proposal from the European Commission on GMOs

On 2 March the European Commission announced its intention to come up with a proposal by the summer to allow more choice to Member States in deciding whether to cultivate GMOs.

Under the current legal framework the Commission adopted two decisions concerning the Genetically Modified Amflora potato, and three decisions on the placing on the market of three GM maize products for food and feed uses.

In line with the political guidelines of President Barroso of September 2009, Commissioner Dalli has been asked to come forward with a proposal by the summer setting out how a Community authorisation system, based on science, can be combined with freedom for Member States to

decide whether or not they wish to cultivate GM crops on their territory.

After a comprehensive authorisation procedure, which started in 2003, and repeated favourable scientific opinions, the Commission decided to authorise Amflora. This GM potato is to be used for the production of starch that is suitable for industrial applications (e.g. paper production). This innovative technology helps to optimise the production process and to save raw materials, energy, water and oil based chemicals.

The decision provides for strict cultivation conditions to prevent the possibility that GM potatoes will remain in the fields after harvest and to ensure that Amflora's seed will not be inadvertently disseminated



In brief



Public consultation on environmental and health risks posed by depleted uranium

The European Commission and the Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER) launch a consultation on a scientific opinion on the environmental and health risks posed by depleted uranium.

Depleted uranium (DU) is a by-product of uranium enrichment, suitable for a number of products, both civilian and military. Public concerns about the effects of DU on human health and the environment relate mainly to its use in military weapons.

In May 2008 the European Parliament passed a resolution on DU weapons which called on the Commission to promote scientific studies into the use and effects of DU and to establish a list of DU contaminated areas for any clean-up operations, should they be necessary.

Consequently, the Commission asked SCHER for an opinion on the health and environmental risks of DU taking into account both the chemical and radiological toxicities of DU, including possible synergistic effects.

SCHER has now adopted a preliminary opinion, concluding that the chemical toxicity of Uranium can be used to assess the health risk due to potential exposures to DU.

Stakeholders are now invited to comment through an online consultation, which will run until 12 April 2010.

To take part to the online consultation, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consultations/

New ICPEN website

A new International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network (ICPEN) website was launched on 15 March - the International Consumer Day. The new website is user friendly and is divided into three separate sections tailored to the needs of consumers, consumer protection professionals and participating ICPEN agencies, facilitating their cooperation within the Network.

For further information, please see:

<http://www.icpen.org/news/welcome-to-the-new-icpen-website.html>

into the wider environment. A complementary authorisation is taken in order to cover the by-products of the starch extraction when they are used as feed.

The European Commission also adopted three decisions authorising GM maize MON863xMON810, MON863xNK603 and MON863xMON810xNK603, for food and feed uses and import and processing.

The three GM maize products received a positive opinion from EFSA and underwent the full authorisation procedure set out in the EU legislation. They are produced by conventional crossing of two or three GM maize - namely MON863, NK603 and MON810 - that are already authorised in the EU for food and feed uses and import and processing.

As Member States failed to return qualified majority decisions for or against these decisions in the Council, the dossiers were sent back to the Commission for decision.

The presence of an antibiotic resistance marker (ARM) gene in the GM



starch potato and the three GM maize products was subject to the highest scrutiny. EFSA examined this issue and issued a separate favourable opinion on 11 June 2009.

The Decision to authorise the cultivation of Amflora is the end of a process which started in Sweden in January 2003 and is based on a considerable volume of sound science. All five authorisations were subjected to the highest scrutiny, ensuring all concerns regarding the presence of an antibiotic resistance marker gene are fully addressed.

The authorisations are valid for 10 years.

For further information, please see:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/58&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

European Consumer Summit 2010

The European Consumer Summit 2010 took place in Brussels on 18 and 19 March. This year's summit focused on services for consumers and in particular on access, fairness and choice.

The event has been largely interactive, with small group discussions on the following subjects: choosing the right service provider; the internet - challenges and opportunities for consumers; bank account fees; car hire; green energy; urban transport.

Workshop discussions first aimed at identifying the specific challenges in each area and then focused on find-

ing practical solutions. The results will feed into the reflections on the future consumer policy strategy.

This year's event featured a strong focus on the media, aiming at reaching beyond the Brussels media village to include wider interests such as good-housekeeping and lifestyle magazines, with the aim of broadening the appeal and exposure of European consumer policy.

For further information, please see:

<http://www.european-consumer-summit.eu/>



EB survey on oral health in the EU

The European Commission has published the results of the first Eurobarometer survey on the self perceived oral health of European citizens. The survey was conducted during October 2009 in the 27 Member States of the European Union and the three candidate countries.

The vast majority of Europeans say that they do not have any difficulties caused by their teeth. However:

- Only 41% of Europeans say that they have all their natural teeth.
- Approximately 15% have experienced difficulties, over the last twelve months, in chewing, biting or eating food because of mouth or teeth problems.
- 57% of those surveyed last consulted a dentist (for their teeth, dentures or gums) less than one year ago. Only 2% have never consulted a dentist.
- The three top reasons given for not having consulted a dentist during the last two years are: dental problem not serious enough (33%), no



teeth or false teeth (16%) and the high cost of check-ups and treatment (15%).

- Almost a fifth of those interviewed consume soft drinks "often" or eat biscuits and cakes.
- However, only a minority of respondents report that they regularly eat sweets or chew gum.

This first survey has been commissioned in the context of the EGO-HID (European Global Oral Health Indicators Development) project, co-financed under the Public Health Programme. A future repeat of this survey will reveal any changes in oral health status that occur over time.

The report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_330_en.pdf

Telecoms: protection from data-roaming "bill shock" in the EU

As from 1 March 2010, European mobile phone operators are obliged under EU roaming rules to offer their customers a cut-off limit facility to protect them from "bill shocks" for surfing the Internet with their mobile phones and laptops while travelling in other EU countries.

Under the roaming rules adopted by the EU's Council of Ministers and European Parliament in June 2009, this cut-off mechanism will, following a warning, cut consumers' mobile connection to the internet while abroad when their bill reaches a specified limit.

Mobile phone operators will be now obliged to offer their customers a monthly cut-off limit of €50. They can also offer customers any other limit, and consumers will receive a warning when they hit 80% of the chosen limit. Until 1 July 2010, customers need to make a deliberate choice in order to benefit from a cut-off limit. Consumers who do not make a choice by 1 July 2010 will have the cut-off limit set at €50 by default as from that date.

This cut-off limit will guarantee more transparency and protection for con-

In brief



Call for experts in behavioural psychology

The Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS) is looking for experts in behavioural psychology for its "Food Imitating Products" working group.

The Commission has recently requested the SCCS to assess the potential risks related to food-imitating or child-appealing chemical consumer products.

Examples of these might be soaps shaped like fruit or shampoos and body lotions with packaging resembling food items.

To allow for a comprehensive assessment, the need for experts in the field of consumer's behavioural psychology has been identified and a call for expression of interest for experts in this area has been recently launched, with the deadline of 9 April 2010.

The SCCS is seeking experts with relevant professional experience, particularly in the area of consumer awareness of risk related to consumer products. The successful candidate(s) would have expertise on the potential appeal that products whose odour, packaging or taste imitates food products can have for consumers - mainly children and seniors.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consumer_safety/index_en.htm

To submit an application, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consultations/calls_experts/sccs_exp_01_en.htm





sumers, and it will ensure that they will no longer face bill shocks for using data roaming services.

Thanks to the EU's roaming rules, the price that operators pay each other per megabyte downloaded has been limited to a safeguard level of 1€ per MB, and it will fall over the next two years. These savings should be passed on to consumers and deliver lower prices for surfing the Internet while abroad.

Member States' national telecoms regulators are responsible for ensuring that mobile phone operators comply with the rules on cut-off mechanisms for data roaming in each

EU country. Consumers can contact the national regulator (http://erg.eu.int/links/index_en.htm) in the Member State where they reside if they encounter any problems or have concerns on these cut off limits.

The European Commission will continue to monitor developments in roaming services and the correct implementation of these provisions, in close cooperation with BEREC, the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications, which held its first meeting on 28 January 2010. The Commission will analyse the functioning of the roaming Regulation, including the provisions on data roaming, in an interim report due in June 2010 and in a more extensive review in June 2011.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/roaming/index_en.htm

Avian influenza: H5N1 in Romania

On 16 March the European Commission adopted a decision confirming the risk areas set up by the Romanian authorities in relation to an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in a backyard poultry farm located in the commune of Letea, in Tulcea county, at the Danube's delta close to the Ukrainian border.

Romania's national laboratory confirmed on 15 March that the outbreak concerns the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza. In order to limit the spread of the virus the Romanian authorities applied immediately the necessary control measures laid down in EU legislation.

These include the killing of all poultry in the infected farm and the establishment of a protection zone with a 3km radius and a surveillance zone with a 10 km radius around the farm, where strict movement con-



trols are in place. Gatherings of poultry and other birds are banned, and on-farm bio-security measures must be strengthened.

The 10km zone around the outbreak is considered to be a "high risk area" and is surrounded by a larger "low risk area" for which also certain restrictions on movements and additional bio-safety measures for poultry farms apply.

This is the first detection of the highly avian influenza H5N1 in the EU in a year. The last case, confirmed in March 2009, concerned a wild duck in Germany.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/dyna/influenza/index.cfm

In brief



Microsoft's roll-out of web browser choice

As from the beginning of March, users of Windows PCs who have Internet Explorer as default web browser are being provided with a browser Choice Screen, designed to give them an effective and unbiased choice between their default and competing web browsers.

On 16 December 2009 the Commission made legally binding on Microsoft the commitments offered by the US software company with respect to the tying of Microsoft's web browser, Internet Explorer, to its dominant client PC operating system, Windows.

Specifically, Microsoft committed to make available for five years in the European Economic Area a "Choice Screen" enabling users of Windows XP, Windows Vista and Windows 7 to choose in an informed and unbiased manner which web browser(s) they want to install in addition to, or instead of, Microsoft's web browser.

It is expected that the browser Choice Screen will be displayed on over 100 million personal computers (PCs) in Europe between now and mid-May. The central page of the choice screen is also available to any internet user at <http://www.browserchoice.eu>.

Computer manufacturers are now able to install competing browsers on Windows PCs instead of, or in addition to, Internet Explorer. Microsoft further committed not to retaliate against PC manufacturers who pre-install a non-Microsoft web browser on the PCs they ship and make it the default web browser.

This should ensure competition and allow consumers to benefit from technical developments and innovation on the web browser market and on related markets.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consumers/web_browsers_choice_en.html



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