



Health & Consumer Voice

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Headline News

Effects of the volcanic ash cloud _____ 1

Top Stories

RAPEX Report 2009 now published _____ 1-2

Awareness of the consequences of antibiotics overuse in the EU _____ 2-3

Consumer Markets Scoreboard: decline in consumer conditions _____ 3-4

New website for Food Veterinary Office country profiles _____ 4

In brief

Second EU Health Prize for Journalists _____ 2

Earth Hour 2010 _____ 3

EB survey on Patient Safety _____ 3

EU Open Day 2010 _____ 4

Running for Europe _____ 4

Effects of the volcanic ash cloud

The European Commission's Health and Consumers Directorate-General is continuously monitoring the potential public health implications resulting from the volcanic ash clouds coming from Iceland, in cooperation with the Member States, the Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organisation, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the Commission Joint Research Centre and the European Civil Protection Mechanism.

DG SANCO is also concerned by the rights of consumers as air passengers and advises to contact a European Consumer Centre, a national consumer organisation or a national enforcement body to get assistance.

According to preliminary risk assessments the risk to human health, at this stage is very low, even though the ash cloud contains fine particles which because of their small size can affect for example the respiratory system. The risks are generally limited because the cloud of ash moves at a high altitude and spreads over large areas.



The rights of consumers as air passengers apply to flight cancellations or delays caused by the volcanic ash cloud. They include: the right to receive information from airlines (to be informed about their rights and the situation as it evolves); the right to care (refreshments, meals and accommodation as appropriate); the right to choose between reimbursement of fares or being re-routed to final destination.

If travellers experience problems having their consumer rights respected, they are advised to contact a European Consumer Centre, a national consumer organisation or a national enforcement body.

For further information, please see:

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

and

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/ecc/index_en.htm

RAPEX Report 2009 now published

The Annual RAPEX Report 2009, published during the RAPEX Media Event held on 15 April in Brussels, shows efficiency of EU's cooperation on dangerous products.

The number of dangerous consumer products notified through the EU's rapid alert system for non-food dangerous products ("RAPEX") rose indeed by 7% in 2009 compared to 2008.

The total number of notifications distributed through the RAPEX system has risen gradually since 2004 (when the General Product Safety Directive, was transposed into the national laws by Member States). In this sixth year, the number of notifications has more than quadrupled from 468 (in 2004) to 1993 (in 2009). The rise from 1866 notifications in 2008 to 1993 last year shows that the capacity of the RAPEX



In brief



Second EU Health Prize for Journalists

On 25 March the European Commission launched the second EU health prize for journalists in print and on-line articles. It aims to stimulate and reward high-quality journalism that raises awareness of healthcare and patients' rights issues.

Journalists are invited to submit articles published in print or on-line publications between 16 June 2009 and 01 July 2010 using an on-line entry form. The competition closes at midnight on 01 July 2010.

The winners will be chosen as follows: in each EU country, a national jury composed of journalists and public health experts, chaired by the European Commission, will select one national finalist. An EU jury will then select three EU level winners among the 27 finalists. Once the names of the national and EU jury members are confirmed, they will be made available on the Journalist Prize website.

The winners will receive cash prizes of 5.000 € for first place, 3.000 € for second and 2.000 € for third. All national finalists will be invited to Brussels in autumn 2010 to participate in a media seminar on EU health issues. The EU Health Prize for journalists was launched for the first time in 2009.

This year's prize follows on from the first health prize for journalists which attracted over 460 articles from journalists from all across the European Union.

The prize is part of the "Europe for Patients" campaign launched in September 2008. The EU health prize for journalists and the Europe for Patients Campaign are funded under the Second Community Health Programme 2008-2013. Further details on the rules and conditions are available on the website.

To submit an article and find out more about the Prize, please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/journalist_prize/2010/index_en.htm

For further information on Europe for Patients campaign, please see:

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

system has increased again in 2009, following more effective market surveillance by Member States.

All EU countries participated in the RAPEX system by detecting and notifying new dangerous products and ensuring appropriate follow-up actions to the information received. Half of the countries further increased their activities in the system and notified more dangerous products than in 2008. The countries making most notifications were Spain (220 notifications), Germany (187 notifications), Greece (154 notifications), Bulgaria

(122 notifications) and Hungary (119 notifications). Notifications sent by these countries represent 47% of all notifications on products posing a serious risk sent via the system.

Toys, clothing, textiles and motor vehicles top the list. Toys (472 notifications), clothing and textiles (395 notifications) and motor vehicles (146 notifications) accounted indeed for 60% of all notifications on products posing a serious risk in 2009.

For further information, please see:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/news/index_en.htm

Awareness of the consequences of antibiotics overuse in the EU

On 9 April the European Commission published two reports demonstrating the need for further progress in the European Union on the issue of anti microbial resistance.

The first is a pan-European survey which reveals some worrying trends in public attitudes towards the use of antibiotics, while the second is a progress report on the 2002 Council Recommendation on the prudent use of antibiotics.

The second Eurobarometer report on Antimicrobial Resistance was carried out at the end of 2009 and follows on from a similar survey that was conducted in 2002 in the EU-15. The results indicate that citizens need more information on the correct use of antibiotics, even though 37% of respondents remember having received information on not overusing antibiotics in the last 12 months. The report is structured around 3 themes: our use of antibiotics, our perceptions regarding the use of antibiotics and an analysis of awareness raising efforts.

Use and perceptions

• 40% of respondents say they have taken antibiotics in the past year, over a third took them for a viral in-



fection like a cold or the flu;

- 95% of these obtained them through a medical prescription and/or administration by a medical practitioner;
- 53% of those surveyed think that antibiotics are able to kill viruses. This misconception is particularly common in the 15-24 age group;
- However, 62% of those who received this information did not change their opinion on antibiotics.

EU and Member States actions

In 2001 the Council adopted a Recommendation on the prudent use of antimicrobial agents and a first progress report was presented in 2005. The second implementation report adopted on 9 April shows progress in several areas. All reporting countries have implemented a surveillance system for antimicrobial resistance and almost all respondents have national systems for the

surveillance of antimicrobial use and antibiotic consumption. Furthermore:

- eighteen countries report that the selling of antibiotics without a medical prescription was not a significant source of misuse of antibiotics;
- several countries have added anti-microbial resistance in medical school curricula and some have launched awareness raising campaigns;
- inter-sectoral cooperation in implementing the national strategies on the prudent use of antimicrobial agents (participation of the Ministries of Health, medicine agencies, hospital and ambulatory sectors, pharmacists, etc.) is increasing.

The report also highlights the need for improved collaboration between the human and animal health sec-

tors. It says that advances need to be made in educating healthcare professionals and the general public on the appropriate use of antibiotics. Finally, the report points out that national strategies need to be further monitored and evaluated.

What Next?

The Commission is stepping up its action on antimicrobial resistance by increasing cooperation between its services, so that all aspects of this threat are addressed. In addition, the Commission will continue to raise awareness on the appropriate use of antibiotics by supporting the Member States and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) in making European Antibiotic Awareness Day a success.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/antimicrobial_resistance/key_documents/index_en.htm

Consumer Markets Scoreboard: decline in consumer conditions

The Spring Consumer Markets Scoreboard, published on 29 March by the European Commission, reveals that EU consumers are still not reaping the full benefits of the internal market due to barriers to cross-border commerce.

The Commission is working to tackle existing barriers, based on a catalogue of measures, including simplifying rules for retailers.

The Consumer Markets Scoreboard provides evidence and alerts about how the internal market is performing for consumers in terms of choice, competitive prices and satisfaction. From 2010, the Spring Scoreboard will examine the integration of the retail market and national conditions for consumers. The Autumn Scoreboard will be adopted in October and will screen 50 specific market sectors to identify those which may be malfunctioning for consumers.



Some of the key findings extracted from the Spring Consumer Markets Scoreboard follow.

Barriers to cross-border trade

The number and value of cross-border transactions is a measure of how integrated the EU retail market is. Cross-border commerce shows limited growth: in 2009, only 29% consumers made any purchase in another EU country (25% in 2008) and only 25% of retailers sold to any other EU country (20% in 2008). The gap between domestic and cross-border online purchases is growing: in 2009, 34% of EU consumers bought goods

In brief



Earth Hour 2010

On Saturday 27 March individuals and organisations all over the world switched off the lights for an hour at 20.30-21.30 local time in an energy-saving gesture called Earth Hour, a global annual initiative organised by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) launched for the first time three years ago and aimed at raising awareness about saving energy.

The European institutions - the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions - participated in Earth Hour by switching off all lights in their buildings.

The Commission and other EU Institutions are not only taking part as a symbolic gesture, but also as a call to change behaviour. We have to do more to save energy, and of course not just for one day. This awareness of energy as a valuable resource is the first step towards reductions.

For further information, please see:

<http://www.earthhour.org>

EB survey on Patient Safety

According to the Eurobarometer survey report on patient safety published on 16 April, over 25% of those surveyed claimed that they or a member of their family had experienced harm (an adverse event) in a healthcare setting. Many of these events go unreported and one third of respondents did not know which organisation was responsible for patient safety in their country.

The publication of the survey coincides with European Patients Rights Day, which is held on 18 April each year with events taking place around Europe to raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding the rights of patients. It is organised by the Active Citizenship Network, an NGO which encourages people to become more involved in policy making through citizens' organisations around Europe.

The Commission is working with Member States to implement the patient safety recommendation, adopted by the EU Health Ministers in June 2009.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/patient_safety/policy/index_en.htm

or services online from national sellers (28% in 2008), but only 8% ordered from elsewhere in the EU (6% in 2008).

Barriers remain, resulting in many traders refusing to deliver abroad. Earlier reports show that over 60% of cross-border orders fail. The Commission is determined to pursue a strategy of dismantling these barriers, based on a catalogue of measures already identified in October 2009. They include ending fragmentation of rules, boosting cross-border dispute resolution and simplifying regulations for retailers.

Consumer environments

The consumer environment is defined by a number of factors e.g. by the quality of regulation concerning consumers and businesses, the effectiveness of resolving disputes and handling complaints, and consumer trust in authorities, retailers, advertisers and consumer organisations.

New website for Food Veterinary Office country profiles

Country profiles for the Member States draw together the results of the Food Veterinary Office (FVO) audits and inspections into a single repository of data on control systems for each Member State.

The current set of published country profiles shows the follow up status for some 5,800 recommendations made to Member States since 2004.

Country profiles record the effective follow-up of FVO reports and recommendations, facilitate the prioritisation of future FVO audits and inspections and contribute to the assessment of overall compliance with EU requirements.

The presentation of FVO country profiles on the Health and Consumers Directorate-General website has now been restructured so that each profile, which was previously

The economic crisis has had an adverse impact on these conditions for consumers, with most countries experiencing a decline. But eight Member States (Portugal, Luxembourg, Ireland, Italy, Austria, France, Slovakia and the United Kingdom) have improved their scores compared with 2008.

Consumer affordability

The Scoreboard found large differences between EU countries in the consumers' ability to afford goods and services, taking into account both the average incomes and the price levels. Strikingly, life for consumers is more affordable in the richer EU countries, despite higher price levels: Luxembourg is by far the most affordable country, followed by the United Kingdom, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Austria.

For further information, please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/strategy/facts_en.htm

presented as a single document, is now presented in a modular format. The country profile has changed to a webpage "portal" with the following elements for each Member State:

- the five most recently published FVO inspection and audit reports;
- the Commission's assessment of the actions taken by the Member States in response to its audits and inspections;
- an overview of how control systems are organised in the Member States;
- a summary of Member States' production, consumption and trade of food, animals and plants drawn from Eurostat;
- some links to useful Member States' websites.

The new website is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/country_profiles_en.cfm

In brief



EU Open Day 2010

The EU Open Day 2010 will take place on Saturday 8 May. The European Commission's event will take place on the same day at the Berlaymont building, from 10.00 to 18.00.

Health and Consumers Directorate-General (DG SANCO) will be there to present its activities to the public. This marks a golden opportunity to "put a face" to the DG and explain exactly what we do by offering information and advice on health and consumer issues.

DG SANCO's stand will feature a number of fun activities, including quizzes and competitions. It will also host a number of bodies related to the DG, such as the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Consumer Centre (ECC-Net) Belgium.

Running for Europe

The 31st edition of the legendary 20km of Brussels will take place on Sunday 30 May 2010. Under the patronage of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, the Commission's Running Club (CACE) will bring the staff from the EU institutions, including family members and friends, to run in their "Running for Europe" team. Over 800 people "ran for Europe" in 2009.

Once again, the Directorate-General for Health and Consumers' "Help - for a life without tobacco" campaign (<http://www.help-eu.com>) and the EUROPE DIRECT Contact Centre will sponsor the team.

As usual, the participation of EC staff is linked to a good cause. In addition to the registration fee, participants were indeed invited to take part in CACE fundraising efforts towards the Schuman Trophy, which distributes funds for underprivileged children in Europe and the developing world.



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