



# Understand something the others don't: This is EU chemicals legislation in a nutshell

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All members of the European Parliament need to understand chemical policy, which is more important than ever. If you are new to European chemical policy, this fact sheet is for you.

## Why you should engage in the topic of chemicals

The chemicals industry is an important sector in the EU economy and the use of industrial chemicals is often considered important for our society. But chemicals also pose a considerable threat. Many are harmful to human health and our environment. Harmful chemicals contaminate our soil, food, water, wildlife, and even our bodies. For example, the group of man-made chemicals known as PFAS can now be found in the blood of every human being.

Chemicals is no small business. About 200 million tons of chemicals that are hazardous to human health and about 80 million tons of chemicals that are hazardous to the environment are [used in the European Union every year](#).

84% of Europeans are [concerned about chemicals in everyday products](#) impacting their health, and 90% are [worried](#) about their environmental impact. It is a rational sentiment since the current chemical legislation does not sufficiently protect our health and our environment.

The awareness of the problem is growing. Both [companies](#) and [investors](#) are now moving towards safer chemicals. It's time for policymakers to follow suit and develop stricter legislation. This would both support frontrunner companies and protect human health and the environment.

# What you need to know about the regulatory system

The EU has one of the most comprehensive and substantial chemical legislations in the world. However, the legislation is not sufficient since the harm caused by chemicals is not under control. For example, [it can take 6 months to put a chemical on the market, but up to 20 years to ban it](#).

The two most important chemical regulations in the EU are REACH and CLP. In addition, there are several sector-specific legal acts governing chemicals in products and processes.

## **REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation, and Restriction of Chemicals)**

This is the principal chemical regulation in Europe. It ensures that (at least) a minimum amount of testing is done before a chemical can be placed on the market. It also continuously regulates the use of hazardous substances via new [restrictions](#) (bans) or by [authorising](#) certain specific uses. The REACH regulation has been in force since 2007, but it suffers from several shortcomings that make it insufficient in protecting our environment and our health.

The current Commission promised – in its ground-breaking [Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability](#) – to present a revision of REACH, but failed to deliver. Thus, there is now strong pressure from several stakeholders on the Commission to make the substantial overhaul that was promised years ago. This may well become one of the most important topics for the next parliament to handle.

## **CLP (Classification, Labelling, and Packaging Regulation)**

The CLP legislation is the basic identifier of harmful chemicals. It classifies hazardous substances in different categories. For example, substances that cause cancer or harm the environment can be classified under the CLP regulation, and CLP rules govern how the hazardous properties of chemicals shall be presented on product labels.

## **Sector-specific regulations**

There are also chemical legislations that apply solely to specific sectors. Pharmaceuticals, biocides, and pesticides are all products that are covered by individual legislations. Other products fall under the REACH regulation but, at the same time, with additional sector-specific regulations, such as toys, cosmetics, detergents, and electronics.

On top of this, several other areas are closely linked to the chemicals legislation. For example, the rules related to workers' health, eco-labelling and waste management are all highly influenced by the classifications made under the CLP regulation.

# What do you have the power to change?

As a member of the European Parliament, you will have plenty of opportunities to engage in the topic of chemicals. The most important in the next term will be the following:

## 1. Make sure the actions of the Chemical Strategy are carried out

[The Chemicals Strategy](#) for Sustainability identified a series of necessary actions. The next EU Parliament and Commission should make sure to fully implement all actions in the strategy that have not yet been completed and consider if additional actions are needed.

## 2. Make sure REACH is improved

The phase-out of the most harmful substances on the market has not occurred at the expected pace under the current REACH regulation, and there is still a significant lack of information on harmful chemicals in products – including consumer products. There is an urgent need for a revision of REACH in line with the Chemicals Strategy, both to protect human health and the environment and to provide legislative predictability for European companies.

## 3. Give the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) the resources to do a good job

The Parliament oversees the EU budget, including the allocation of funds to ECHA. In addition, it can question the Commission and ECHA about the implementation of the EU's chemicals legislation and the agency's activities. Making sure that the Commission is doing all it can to reduce the use of hazardous chemicals and that ECHA is well-funded should be a priority for the Parliament.

## 4. Get balanced advice

As a Member of Parliament, you must create laws that are efficient and just. Making legislation from an industry “wish list” can be detrimental to a sustainable future. Already now, there are many loopholes in the legislation that are proficiently exploited by cynical actors. Read [our satirical guide](#) to see how it is done and remember that even though lobbyists from industry organisations can make it sound like something else, the purpose of companies is to maximise profits, not to protect human health and the environment.

The purpose of the European chemicals legislation is not to create “unnecessary” bureaucracy but to ensure our protection. Therefore, it is extremely important to make sure that you receive balanced advice and do not forget to consider opinions from independent scientists and environmental organisations.

## Would you like to know more?

Find more information about chemicals, REACH and CLP at the [European Chemicals Agency's website](#).

Read more about [ChemSec here](#) or [send us an e-mail](#). We are readily available to answer all your questions.

### **Burden of the past**

In 1930, the global chemical production was 1 million tons per year. In 1998, it was about 400 million tons. Today, it is over 500 million tons per year and exceeding the planetary boundaries. Most of the new chemicals were released onto the market without restriction and with no information on their potentially harmful effect.

Since the last decades of the 20th century, it has become increasingly clear that chemicals have numerous harmful effects, such as cancer, endocrine disruption, allergies, and widespread environmental pollution.