



Dangerous Chemicals – correct labelling?

Considerable deficiencies have been found in the indication of dangerous chemicals. The labelling of not more than 40% of the preparations currently on the market, as well as only 30% of the safety data sheets comply with the legal provisions.

To minimise the risks arising from the handling of chemicals, an EU-wide inspection of chemicals was carried out with regard to their correct labelling. The aim was to improve dangerous product declarations. The results of the inspection project concerning dangerous chemical products show that the labelling of about 60% of the examined preparations is incorrect, and that two third of the safety data sheets are incorrect or incomplete. This does not nearly correspond to the statements delivered by the chemical industry on the quality of compliance with chemicals legislation.

In the context of the now completed ECLIPS project of the EU (European Classification and Labelling Inspections of Preparations, including Safety Data Sheets), the chemicals inspected were especially those subject to regulations only recently entered into force, such as carcinogenic preparations and preparations presenting a hazard for the environment.

Both labelling and the safety data sheets are key information sources for dangerous substances and preparations. Correct labelling enables the general public to recognise the risks arising from a dangerous product and to avoid them by taking the stipulated safety measures. Safety data sheets are the most important source for professional users since they permit the safe handling of the product in companies and enable safety measures to be taken for the protection of staff, as well as appropriate steps in the event of an accident.

The declared aim of EU chemicals legislation is the protection of man and the environment. Implementation and enforcement of the required regulations are supervised by the individual Member States. They alone are responsible for inspection activities in their own countries.

Since the Chemicals Legislation European Enforcement Network (CLEEN) was established in the mid-1990s, projects coordinated EU-wide have been carried out. The CLEEN secretariat is currently provided by the Austrian *Umweltbundesamt* (Federal Environment Agency) and the German *Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin* (Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health).

The meanwhile completed ECLIPS project has revealed severe deficiencies in the key information sources on dangerous products. It shows that there is an urgent need for action with regard to an improvement of the situation. One of the focuses in the now complete final report is a list of recommendations to be submitted to the Commission, the Member States and the chemical industry. By way of example, a recommendation for small enterprises should be mentioned, which suggests that they become aware of their responsibility and of the risks that may arise for man or the environment from dangerous chemicals. This will be of particular importance under the future chemicals policy (REACH), which will no longer provide for a harmonised risk classification of certain properties.