



Improving access to product information

Vito A. Buonsante

Making public access work in Europe

Geneva, 7 February 2013

An introduction to ClientEarth

- ClientEarth is a non-profit environmental law organisation
- We use law, science and policy to create pragmatic solutions to key environmental challenges
- We work with partners in government and NGOs, providing legal solutions for policymakers and holding those in power accountable
- Our work covers climate change and energy, environmental justice, biodiversity, forests and health and environment

Aarhus Centre

- EU Aarhus Centre established in 2011;
- It offers NGOs and citizens' groups legal advice on their rights to information, participation and justice in environmental matters;
- Aims to promote and advance transparency and good governance within the European institutions and other EU bodies.

Outline

- Legal framework;
- Problem identification;
- Benefits of information on products;
- Challenges and obstacles;
- Recommendations.

The Convention

- 6. Each Party shall encourage operators whose activities have a significant impact on the environment to inform the public regularly of *the environmental impact* of their activities *and products*, where appropriate within the framework of voluntary eco-labelling or eco-auditing schemes or by other means.
- 8. Each Party shall develop mechanisms with a view to ensuring that sufficient product information is made available to the public in a manner which enables consumers to make *informed* environmental *choices*.

SAICM

- Para. 15 (b) reads: “To ensure, for all stakeholders:
- (i). That information on chemicals throughout their life cycle, ***including, where appropriate, chemicals in products***, is available, accessible, user friendly, adequate and appropriate to the needs of all stakeholders. Appropriate types of information include their effects on human health and the environment, their intrinsic properties, their potential uses, their protective measures and regulation;
- (ii). That such information is disseminated in appropriate languages by making full use of, among other things, the media, hazard communication mechanisms such as the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals and relevant provisions of international agreements”.

Concerns

- Over 100.000 chemicals on the market;
- Little or no information known for most of it;
- Regulatory systems not able to timely protect citizens from unacceptable risks related to hazardous chemicals;
- Insufficient or no information on chemicals in products at all stages of life cycle.
- Environmental degradation and diseases caused by exposure to chemicals.

Needs

- **Traceability:** Need for awareness of companies about the chemicals content of their products;
- **Market pressure:** push companies to phase out hazardous chemicals;
- **Right to know:** right of citizens to make an informed choice about the products they use.

Benefits

- Easier to green the supply chain;
- Control of the exposure to chemicals substances;
- Awareness in end of life management of products;
- Push for innovation;
- Support for the general population of making responsible purchasing choices;
- Health and environmental benefits in the medium long term.

Challenges

- Harmonisation among legal frameworks;
- Existence of several regulations differently dealing with chemicals (food, medicines, pesticides, cosmetics, articles);
- Industry's claim for confidentiality;
- Complicated supply chain to track;
- Set up and cost of a notification/communication system;
- Enforcement.

Recommendations

- Develop a harmonised model for the traceability of chemicals in products;
- Disclosure of information as a condition to access markets (no data – no market!);
- Establish publicly accessible databases with notified information (including brand names!);
- Easy to understand labels for products containing hazardous substances;
- Information on safe use and disposal compulsory.

Thank you for your
attention

vbuonsante@clientearth.org

For more details see
<http://www.clientearth.org/aarhus-centre/home/>