

## **The European Parliament Environment Committee debates the GHS proposal**

The European Union is in the process of harmonising existing EU directives on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures with the Globally Harmonised System developed at UN level. On 28 January, The EP Environment Committee discussed the draft report of MEP Amalia Sartori on the Commissions proposal.

On the whole, the draftswoman as well as MEPs representing the main political groups in the European Parliament agreed on the need for a swift first reading-agreement on the regulation in order to finalise a deal under the Slovenian Presidency, i.e. during the first half of 2008. Several members, including Mrs. Sartori advocated an adoption of the proposal with only minor changes.

Remarkable however, was the expressed distinction made between the proposal as a legal compartment, and the annexes as technical documents: members were urged to leave the annexes untouched. ChemSec is of the opinion that the Annexes are an integrated part of a legal text and should also be treated as such by the lawmakers. Should changes be necessary, the responsibility for the Annexes should not be handed over to the services of the EU executive, i.e. the civil servants of the European Commission.

Further, a number of leading MEPs pointed out the need to keep the GHS in line with the EU chemicals regulation, REACH. This is a logic consequence of the reasoning when developing REACH, where legislators took into account a future interaction between the labelling requirements in REACH and the foreseen adoption of the GHS.

Mrs. Sartori has in her draft report opted for the road taken by the Commission regarding acute oral toxicity, by excluding the fifth and lowest category for labelling substances and mixtures. An argument for this is to avoid "over marking", i.e. a fear of a resulting disrespect for labelling. Furthermore, cost-arguments have been brought forward for why the lowest grade should not be included.

However the liberal group argued that GHS must be incorporated as a whole, not as selective building blocks. Different systems will arguably raise trade barriers. If different countries in the world have different labels, products and substances have to be differently labelled for different markets, one obstacle that the GHS was supposed to solve. In addition, consumers and workers certainly deserve the same information and protection independent of where they may be in the world.

Accordingly, ChemSec supports the strive to include the original acute oral toxicity Category 5 in GHS. Further, as consistency is vital in (European) chemicals regulation and management, GHS must take into account the prioritisation and aspiration expressed in REACH. As PBTs and vPvBs are classified as being Substances of Very High Concern in REACH, and are central in the prioritisation of these high concern chemicals in REACH, a label should be introduced for the persistent, bio-accumulating and toxic (PBT), and the very persistent and very bio-accumulating (vPvB) group. Consumers need to be made aware of PBT properties for correct and safe handling, and for correct disposal of substances and mixtures with PBT properties.