

Meeting note - Communicators' Network

Time	Thursday 19 October 2017, 9:30 – 16:00 (Brussels time)
Place	MCE conference centre, Brussels
Participants	<p><i>Member States representatives:</i> Donata Pipiraitė-vališkienė, Alexander Paul, Margaret Wouters, Suzanne Wiandt, Maria Orphanou, Martina Danihelova, Laurène Chochois, Caroline Walsh, Miklós Czékus, Sidsel Dyekjaer, Sari Tuhkunen, James Lloyd, Elisa Le, Anna Amelkina, Amanda Ozola, Helena Vogel*, Serena Santoro*, Francesca Giannotti*, Laura Zamora*, Karin Alkell*</p> <p><i>Accredited Stakeholders:</i> Tine Cattoor, Mariola Hauke, Carlos Molina, Marko Susnik, Maria Linkova-Nijs, Chiara Bellone de Grecis, Erin Vera</p> <p><i>Commission:</i> Temenuzhka Popova, DG GROW</p> <p><i>ECHA:</i> Tiiu Bräutigam (chair), Adam Elwan, Hanna Torkkeli, Laura Walin*</p> <p><i>* followed online</i></p>

This was a combined meeting of the accredited stakeholders' communicators' network and the REACH 2018 communicators' network. The aim of the meeting was to share best practice on communications and to discuss joint communications activities.

1. REACH 2018 related communications

ECHA introduced many of its initiatives relating to the REACH 2018 deadline, such as the recent SME market segmentation study; new initiatives of the Directors' Contact Group; reaching out to downstream users, consultants and importers; IT and web updates; the toolkit for promoting REACH 2018 deadline to companies; using social media to reach out to companies and the new interactive registration statistics.

The participants had many questions relating to the use of the interactive registration statistics and the data it will contain. ECHA highlighted that the new statistics will not break the numbers down by deadline but show the overall numbers of submitted registrations, substances and companies on an EEA and national level.

Many participants mentioned that the original estimations for 2018 registrations and substances do not seem realistic and that there could be a big gap between those estimations and received registrations. This discrepancy had been picked up by some media. An idea of analysing the C&L notifications for a more reliable number for 2018 was raised. ECHA pointed out that a success for the deadline would be two-fold: 1) those companies who want to register are able to do it, 2) there are no disruptions in the supply chain.

They also highlighted that many downstream users may face problems if their suppliers do not register their substances. Therefore, companies should be encouraged to contact their suppliers and ask them about their registration intentions. It was also pointed out that some decisions of suppliers not to register might actually be linked to the risk management decisions concerning their substance (e.g. CLH, authorisation, restriction).

Downstream users of chemicals were identified as an important target audience for communication activities as the communication in supply chain still needs to be improved. Many downstream users were still not aware of their role.

Further challenges discussed related to the technical difficulties that companies may face when updating their dossiers (IUCLID 5 vs IUCLID 6), both the financial costs of and time needed for registration for SMEs and especially the issue of accessing data – costs of letters of access and resources companies need for the registration. Feedback from Germany reinforced the complex situation of SMEs: many are finding ways how to avoid registration instead of preparing their dossiers. Many of these issues could be discussed more in detail within the HelpNet.

The participants also highlighted the need to promote the dispute mechanism for SMEs and using the SME Ambassador as an unofficial mediator as a last resort. It was also discussed that communications about the necessity of challenging the costs of letters of access could be useful. ECHA told that it will soon publish a letter template for companies to ask for the cost itemisation from their lead registrants. This template will not be translated as the SIEFs mainly work in English.

Representatives from Austria and Germany presented their activities related to awareness raising and knowledge building: events such as the REACH 2018 SME workshop in Vienna, Chemicals Watch Expo in Berlin, REACH 2018 and beyond in Sofia and a roadtour through Germany and its follow-up. They also highlighted main questions and concerns of SMEs.

In the following discussion about communicating about the REACH 2018 deadline, positive messages about companies who already registered successfully were considered important. Some countries had positive case studies that they could share with others. Videos and webinars were found to be useful tools in reaching out to companies. Many participants also had good experiences in using social media, targeted e-mails, events, direct calls or key words on Google in order to reach out to companies.

Breakout groups discussed more in detail last minute actions that could be done in order to reach out to registrants:

- Calls to companies, letters, social media, use company visits
- Media outreach, think also about trade media as an effective channel
- Newsletters
- Case studies from companies who registered successfully – ECHA newsletter to feature those!
- Change the focus of outreach communications from “unreachables” to companies that are asking “what if?” questions
- Now focus on contingency questions, guidelines needed, DCG solutions needed
- Practical tips based on dispute outcomes
- Support for social media activities, venture into social media campaigns to reach the unreachable
- Focus also on importers

The participants also discussed best ways to reach out to importers of chemicals and identified the following potential channels and multipliers: targeted webinars, associations, chambers of commerce, transport or logistics associations, customs and accountants.

ECHA informed the network about its plans to launch the registration results on 1 June 2018 with a big media event in Brussels. The participants were encouraged to think about national actions as well.

After the deadline, still some joint communication is needed from the network. The phase 7 of the REACH 2018 Roadmap – keeping your dossier up-to-date – will be launched in late 2018. To prepare for that, a further Webex will be organised in the second half of 2018.

Action points:

- ECHA to inform the network about new releases – such as the interactive registration statistics, new videos or DCG developments.
- Participants to inform ECHA about positive case studies – companies who registered successfully – that ECHA could use in its communications.
- Next Webex foreseen will be for the phase 7 launch in late 2018.

2. Communicating to the general public

Dutch website for consumers

Netherlands representative introduced their new web pages targeted at consumers, Waarz It Wat In, <https://waarzitwatin.nl/>. The website has been recently published and the campaign to promote it will start in 2018. The site focuses on products and what chemicals they contain and it has also a feedback functionality. New product groups will be added to it.

The participants found the website very useful and asked about translation plans and how often it would be updated. Currently, no translations were foreseen as the website is targeting Dutch consumers.

ECHA's microsite for consumers

ECHA staff presented the plans to launch ECHA's website for consumers "Chemicals in our life" in a new, more user-friendly format in March 2018. The pages will be very visual and tell about chemicals in people's everyday lives, make consumers aware of their rights and inform about how chemicals are regulated in the EU. The site will be translated to all EU languages, regularly updated and it can link to national campaigns on chemicals.

The participants asked about the consumer consultation that ECHA had done when planning the site's content. ECHA could share these results with the network.

Social media

ECHA presented its current plans – both normal updates on social media channels and using sponsored updates to boost visibility - and asked the participants about good practice from their side. In some countries, competitions to young people, like Science week and other science-related topics, had been working well on social media. Many participants were going to promote the Health and safety week in October. Schools were also proposed as one multiplier on chemical safety.

AOB

- Discussion on substitution – ECHA is looking for good examples on substitution and encouraged the participants to provide examples. In France, there is a national website for substitution, covering e.g. BPA and phthalates.
- Discussion on how to better use REACH and CLP data for occupational health topics.
- Discussion on the EU-wide AskREACH SVHC app, especially about validating the data the consumers receive and the app's limitations. The main goal – raising consumers' and retailers' awareness on SVHCs in products - was found very positive.

Action points:

- ECHA to inform the network when the consumer site is launched and share the findings of the consumer survey.

3. Future of the network

Discussion on how participants found the network so far and what recommendations they would have for its future:

Many helpdesk representatives said that the network had been very useful to coordinate activities and exchange information. However, after the REACH 2018 deadline and the phase 7 update in 2018, the focus in their work will shift and some participants won't be joining this network anymore. At the moment, helpdesks' focus lies on contingency planning and immediate help for the REACH 2018 deadline, which is more a HelpNet task.

In the future, the communicators' network should focus more on specific topical projects with project groups (for example: substitution, supply chain communication, chemicals and workers, chemicals and consumers). ECHA will follow up on the proposal.