

Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Goods: EU Public Health Sacrificed on the Altar of Corporate Profit

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Science and Medicine](#)

A new report by the campaign/watchdog body Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) reveals huge conflicts of interests in the Scientific Committees under DG SANCO, the European Commission's department in charge of consumer issues [1].

These Committees assess the risk to humans and the environment of chemicals found in a huge range of everyday items, from shampoo to baby bottles. Their opinions guide European Commission regulators, who decide which chemicals are safe and at what levels, and which should be banned.

The research found that two thirds of scientists had at least one, and some many more, conflicts of interest due to their links to industries impacted by assessments. The research focused on assessment procedures involving the Scientific Committees with regard to four substances, including endocrine disrupting parabens and DNA-damaging titanium dioxide – in nano-form. All of the substances are already widely available on the market.

Corporate Europe Observatory's Pascoe Sabido says:

"Judging the potential risk of substances like endocrine-disrupting parabens can have a huge impact on whether we enjoy a healthy life, a healthy environment or even the healthy development of an unborn baby."

Such chemicals could potentially cause great harm to human health and the environment. However, the assessments of these chemicals by the Scientific Committees can potentially impact the financial fortunes of companies involved in producing and using the substances.

Sabido add:

"This means that the independence of the scientists providing the expert advice needs to be above and beyond any suspicion of industry influence – which is not the case."

Having gone through the annual declarations of the interests of all 57 members involved in the Scientific Committees' opinions on the four substances examined (parabens, nano titanium-dioxide, nano silver, and mercury dental amalgams), 67 percent of the scientists were found to have links with industries with a direct or indirect interest in the assessed chemicals. The research exposed links to pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline, chemical behemoth DuPont and consumer goods heavyweight Unilever.

CEO found that the most common conflict was working in a consultative or advisory role for industry. This means direct payment to the expert – or in some cases their research institution – for services to those companies whose products were regulated following the Scientific Committee opinions.

Sabido continues:

“A narrow conflict of interest policy and insufficient resources for screening and cross-checking has seriously undermined the independence of the Scientific Committees. To ensure the assessments produced live up to public expectations, DG SANCO needs to seriously examine how its processes and procedures can be reformed. This includes immediate changes, like broadening their definition of a conflict of interest, as well as longer term goals such as increasing the involvement of independent public scientists in risk assessment and ultimately ending all links between industries and the safety assessment of the products they produce.”

Ordinary Europeans expect officials involved with public sector institutions to uphold the public interest and be independent from commercial influence. They do not expect them to serve and profit from commercial interests at cost to the public’s health and safety.

However, from the European Food Safety Agency to the Scientific Committees, what they too often get is massive conflicts of interest throughout the EU [2,3]. What they too often get is a European Commission that is beholden to massive corporate lobbying, not least the financial and biotech sectors [4,5].

They get an EU that sidelines civil organizations, trade unions, NGOs and the like in favour of powerful corporations who hide behind the notion of ‘free trade’ in order to destroy workers’ rights, weaken health and safety, get their health-damaging products onto the market, by pass democratic procedures and threaten or intimidate governments with legal action and massive financial payouts courtesy of the taxpayer [6].

They get regulators who turn a blind eye to the deleterious effects of products that pose a serious systemic risk to the public [7] and who give the nod to products based not on independent research but a company’s statements or secretive studies taken at face value and then deliberately keep the public in the dark [8].

In essence, what Europeans have had in recent times is a European Commission that is a captive but willing servant of a corporate agenda, a Commission that is essentially “a disgrace to the democratic traditions in Europe” [9].

This recent report by CEO will do little to instill the public’s rapidly waning confidence in Brussels.

Notes

1] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/attachments/ceo_-_sanco_sc_-_conflicts_of_interest.pdf

2] <http://corporateeurope.org/revolvingdoorwatch>

3] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/attachments/unhappy_meal_-_report_23_10_2013.pdf

4] http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/attachments/financial_lobby_report.pdf

5] <http://corporateeurope.org/international-trade/2014/07/who-lobbies-most-ttip>

6] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-us-eu-trans-atlantic-free-trade-agreement-tafta-->

[devastating-social-and-environmental-consequences/5375692](#)

7] <http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2014/15519-the-glyphosate-toxicity--studies-you-re-not-allowed-to-see>

8] <http://earthopensource.org/index.php/reports/17-roundup-and-birth-defects-is-the--public-being-kept-in-the-dark>

9) http://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/record_captive_commission.pdf

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