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Plasticisers in child day care centres

Parents and kindergartens use right to information as foreseen by REACH

Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) published a study yesterday on plasticisers (phthalates) found in the dust in child day care centres. These results are confirmed by Federal Environment Agency measurements which also determined higher plasticiser concentrations in dwellings. Plasticisers are thought to be the cause of malformation of the genitals and fertility dysfunction. Their main source is fitments made of soft polyvinyl chloride (PVC), for example PVC flooring, vinyl wallpapers, exercise mats, plastic tablecloths, or leatherette furniture upholstery.

Exposure can easily be reduced, however. Parents and day care centres should seek to purchase products that do not contain any worrisome plasticisers. "Merchants and retail outlets are obligated by law to divulge to consumers upon request whether their new flooring contains these harmful plasticisers. The European chemicals legislation REACH requires trade to provide information within 45 days about any Substances of Very High Concern. Parents and day care centres should make use of this right," said UBA President Jochen Flasbarth. UBA has prepared a sample letter that can be used to address merchants.

The four most commercially known plasticisers were put on the so-called Candidate List of Substances of Very High Concern by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the EU Member States. Other phthalates are slated to follow. Through inclusion on the list the onus to provide extensive information is on producers, importers and retail, and the right to information is extended to the general public. Everyone is in a position to steer purchasing behaviour and opt for alternatives that are available on the market.

The scope of REACH goes even further: three phthalates will be subject to authorisation starting 2015, after which each and every use of these substances must be authorised by the European Chemicals Agency. Although it is still four years off, the signals have been sent to the market, as evidenced by the fact that many PVC manufacturers have switched to products that do not contain worrisome plasticisers. As a precaution UBA recommends not using plasticised PVC at all. Making a switch to products with the Blue Angel ecolabel is worthwhile in many cases. The label designates products that are produced ecologically and do not harm health.

The UBA sample letter (in German) can be downloaded here: <http://www.reach-info.de/dokumente/musterbrief.doc>

For more information about the Blue Angel eco-label or the *Blauer Engel - Gesund Wohnen* manual is here: <http://www.blauer-engel.de/>

Dessau-Roßlau, 24 March 2011