

What REACH Means for Users of Chemicals

What is REACH?

REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of Chemicals) is the current system for controlling chemicals in Europe. It became law in the UK on 1st June 2007. You need to understand the ways it might affect you.

Do you use chemicals in your business?

Most businesses use chemicals and many rely on them without realising it. For example, you may use them in the manufacture of finished goods or simply to keep your machinery operating and your premises clean. Examples include paints, metals, glues, solvents and cleaning materials.

What will happen to chemicals under REACH?

From 1st December 2008, chemicals that are manufactured or imported into the EU have to be registered with the European Chemical Agency (ECHA) in Helsinki. Not all chemicals will be registered straight away. If a manufacturer or importer pre-registered a chemical, they may not have to submit a registration for several years. Your supplier should be able to tell you if the chemicals you use have been pre-registered or registered and the pre-registration or registration number as appropriate. If a manufacturer or importer has not pre-registered or registered a chemical then in most cases it is now illegal for the manufacturer or importer to continue to supply that chemical.

As a user, REACH may make things better for you as it is designed to provide more information on chemicals and increase confidence in their safe use. In particular, better information on the hazards of chemicals and how to use them safely will be passed down the supply chain by chemical manufacturers and importers through improved Safety Data Sheets. Unless you make or import chemicals yourself, as a user it is highly unlikely that you will need to register chemicals. If you do make or import chemicals then you should read information [UK REACH CA Information Leaflet Number 2 – What REACH Means for Manufacturers](#) or [UK REACH CA Information Leaflet Number 3 – What REACH Means for Importers](#) for more information on what you might need to do under REACH.

What do I need to do?

Ask yourself what you do in your business and where chemicals might be used? For example, if you make anything from formulations (e.g. paints, coatings) through to objects for sale then the chances are you use chemicals in some form. Generally, if you are using chemicals or mixtures of them (e.g. paint, lubricants, cleaning agents, etc) in the way that is expected then REACH probably won't mean significant changes for you. You might consider drawing up an inventory of all the chemicals you use in your premises (see [UK REACH CA Information Leaflet Number 11- How to Build an Inventory](#))

If your business relies on using chemicals that aren't very common you may need to make sure that these chemicals are still available for your uses. You should consider contacting your supplier to find out if the chemical(s) in question have been pre-registered or registered by whoever makes or imports it and that your uses that have or will be covered by the registration. It is possible that some companies, for example for business reasons, may decide not to register some chemicals. If so, then you may need to find an alternative manufacturer/importer of the substance or even re-think your processes.

If you use a chemical in a novel way that is perhaps not expected, then you will need to consider letting your supplier know. This use will need to be considered for registration by the supplier. If you don't want to let your supplier know about this use (for example because of commercial concerns) then you don't have to, but it will mean that you will have to let ECHA know about this use and possibly have to submit your own risk assessment. Once the chemical has been registered and you have been provided with a safety data sheet listing the registration number you have a maximum of 6 months to provide information about your use to ECHA if it is not included in the registration. Your supplier should be able to tell you which uses are covered by the registration.

What REACH Means for Users of Chemicals

Safety data sheets under REACH

You may notice some changes to the safety data sheets that your supplier provides. Once chemicals are registered, safety data sheets will list registration numbers. Safety data sheets may also include **exposure scenarios**. An exposure scenario describes the operating conditions and risk management measures that have been identified by the supplier as necessary to use the chemical safely in your process. REACH requires you to follow the advice on risk management measures given in the exposure scenario attached to the safety data sheet. If you use different risk management measures to those described in the exposure scenario, then you should be able to justify why your measures offer an equivalent (or better) level of protection for human health and the environment to those described in the exposure scenario. If you need to change the risk management measures used at your workplace in order to comply with the exposure scenario then you have a maximum of 12 months (after you have received a safety data sheet listing a registration number for a chemical) to do this.

Further information

For advice on the application of REACH obligations, you can contact the UK REACH Competent Authority's national helpdesk:

Email: UKREACHCA@hse.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.hse.gov.uk/reach

