

## EU's chemicals regulation enters into force on 1 June



By Emily Smith

### **Legislation to improve EU chemicals safety comes into force tomorrow (1 June).**

The regulation on the registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals, known as REACH, was proposed in 2003 in response to health and environmental fears about old chemicals laws.

It won approval last December, after three years of disagreements over the cost and practicalities of reforming a multi-billion euro industry sector.

The June deadline is unlikely to cause any overnight changes, but it will ultimately lead to 30,000 chemicals being assessed for safety and use over the next ten years.

The European Chemicals Agency will formally be opened tomorrow in Helsinki. Ten members of staff, all of them temporarily seconded European Commission officials, have so far joined the agency, with another 30 expected over the summer.

Two hundred full-time agency members of staff have to be recruited before 1 June next year. Only after this date can the first stage of the agency's work – registering new chemicals and pre-registering existing substances – begin.

Health and environment groups say it is too early to celebrate REACH. Nadia Haiama of Greenpeace said that her group would be publishing a guidebook on 1 June, encouraging citizens and non-governmental organisations to make sure the new legislation is implemented properly.

The book will follow a May publication from Greenpeace-led lobby group Chemical Reaction, explaining REACH to the public. The book tells readers that REACH "has many loopholes and legal uncertainties...but we can still influence the implementation of REACH to change it for the better over the next few years".

Business is also gearing up to deal with the new rules. Engineering industry association Orgalime in May published 'REACH in a nutshell' – a 37-page overview of the legislation for the producers, importers and users of chemicals.

The chemicals industry today employs 1.65 million people in the EU.