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PRESS RELEASE

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Foul-smelling whiff from air fresheners!

Did you know that by using an air freshener in your living room you are probably breathing in more toxic substances than you would in the middle of traffic in Rue de la Loi¹?

That is the sad conclusion of a test carried out by BEUC and five of its member organisations on air fresheners². Indeed, in spite of what manufacturers would have us believe, air fresheners do not "purify" the ambient air, but on the contrary pollute it by releasing well-known toxic substances.

Of the 76 products tested, many contain:

- substances that irritate the respiratory tract, allergens, potential carcinogens such as acetaldehyde or styrene, substances known to be dangerous to health such as toluene and chlorobenzene, glycol ethers³, phthalates and artificial musk;
- but also **formaldehyde**, known to cause cancer in humans, detected in concentrations in excess of 10 µg/m³ (WHO standard for sensitive persons) in the air after the use of several types of incense and one electric scenter;
- and **benzene**, another carcinogen for which the WHO recommends zero exposure. It is indeed surprising to see that public authorities spend large amounts of public money on reducing benzene levels in urban areas while some of the products tested release benzene and can be bought in any supermarket...

Not to mention all the other chemicals not assessed in this test and about which we know nothing...

These products represent a real risk to health not only of allergy sufferers, asthmatics, pregnant or nursing women and children, but also to anyone using them continuously.

We therefore ask that:

- substances contained in air fresheners undergo toxicological testing before they are put on the market;
- information on allergens be provided on labels, with the wording "not for use in the presence of pregnant women, young children or asthmatics";
- the advertising and marketing of such products be regulated to avoid misleading messages such as "purifies the air" or "natural product";

According to Mr. Jim Murray, BEUC Director, "no toxic chemicals should be released through every-day consumer products. Our test underlines the importance of the REACH proposal and the need to focus on the danger of chemicals, rather than on the quantities in which they are produced".

"The results of the test conducted by BEUC are shocking but don't surprise me", said Mrs. Frédérique Ries MEP, adding that "indoor pollution is a real public health issue and it is essential that sensitive persons such as children or pregnant women are no longer exposed to toxic products".

¹ Concentrations of benzene in Rue de la Loi, for example, are around 6µg/m³ while a liquid air freshener open for two hours can release up to 8 µg/m³!

² BEUC, Test-Achats, Altroconsumo, OCU, DECO and UFC-Que Choisir analysed the quality of the air breathed by users of household air fresheners. A total of 76 products (Belgian, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese) were tested for concentrations of certain chemical substances (volatile organic compounds, or VOCs) released during use and therefore breathed in by consumers. For the Belgian market, five concentrated sprays and vaporisers, 13 gels and liquid scenters, five electric scenters, nine perfumed candles and five natural products (incense and essential oils) produced very surprising results.

³ For the majority of the products tested, concentrations of VOCs detected in the air after use were well above 200µg/m³, the US standard for healthy indoor air. Some results peaked at 4000 or 5000 µg/m³!



Reference: **ANNEX to the PR 023/2004**

The link between air fresheners and the REACH proposal

The results of our test on air fresheners are quite shocking and highlight the importance of the REACH proposal.

Few people are aware that air-fresheners can be a health hazard and that they are filling the air with a lot of chemicals. The word “air freshener” sounds as if it purifies the air, whereas, in fact, we are only adding pollutants to air that is already heavily polluted. Due to advertising messages, people actually believe that those products refresh the air in their homes and add natural fragrances. They are not aware that these odours are, in fact, synthetic chemicals, most of which have never been the subject of an in-depth toxicological study. The effects of most of them on health and the environment have not been subjected to sufficient evaluation before the products were launched onto the market.

The health hazards linked to air fresheners are reflected in many other consumer products and this issue urgently needs to be addressed. The results of our test underline the consumer messages with regard to REACH, which, although a step in the right direction, contains a number of flaws:

- The focus should be on chemicals that seem to be most dangerous rather than on the quantities in which they are produced;
- There should be no toxic, persistent or bio-accumulative chemicals released through every-day consumer products;
- REACH takes no account of the fact that consumers are affected by chemicals from many sources;
- Consumer products that release these chemicals are currently not labelled, and they should be. Warnings and symbols should be extended to cover consumer articles and not just substances and preparations.

We hope the results of the studies will ensure that the Members of the European Parliament and officials representing the member states in Council understand that REACH is not just about costs to industry, but also about making products that consumers use every day as safe as they possibly can be.