



ANIMAL TESTING POLICY

WWF's Mission

WWF's mission, as a conservation organisation, is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

WWF considers that the continued use of chemicals for which there are few or no safety data presents one of the greatest potential threats to the well-being of both current and future generations of humans and wildlife across the globe. WWF has been working for more than a decade to end the insidious threat to biological diversity from persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic chemicals whose hazards are known or strongly suspected, and to better understand the increasingly visible threats from endocrine disrupting chemicals.

Background

It is an undisputed fact that thousands of chemicals are being released into the atmosphere, into water, or sold in consumer products despite utterly inadequate safety assessments. For example, of the 2,600 largest production chemicals in the EU, 21 per cent have no safety data and 65 per cent have a safety data set below the minimum requirement of the OECD & EU authorities (1).

Among the 2,863 chemicals produced at rates over a million pounds per year in the United States, fewer than a quarter have been tested to see if they may cause chronic health effects, only 15 per cent have been tested for effects on reproduction, and only 12 chemicals have ever been tested to determine if they may cause neurological problems in children. This means that all of us – our children, pets, and wildlife – are at risk in a huge uncontrolled chemical experiment.

There is an urgent need for effective management of hazardous chemicals to protect humans and wildlife. WWF advocates the systematic safety assessment of chemicals for this purpose. Unfortunately, for a great many chemicals there are insufficient data to enable full safety assessments. Further testing is therefore necessary to better inform risk management and to improve scientific understanding of emerging toxic threats such as endocrine disruption.

WWF is involved in the animal testing debate because, whilst we are opposed to any unnecessary animal testing, we are forced to acknowledge that validated alternative test methods do not yet exist for the detection of some forms of toxicity, particularly endocrine disruption. We believe that non-animal methods, human epidemiological studies, and field studies on wildlife should be used to the fullest extent possible in providing chemical safety data. However, until a comprehensive range of non-animal alternatives can be developed and validated, the use of some animal tests is still necessary if we are to protect ourselves, wildlife, and future generations from the potentially harmful effects of chemicals that are used on a daily basis.

WWF is especially concerned about the threat to wildlife and humans from endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs). EDCs are chemicals that have the ability to interfere with the normal functioning of natural hormones, even at very low levels of exposure. There has been accumulating evidence and growing recognition that EDCs are threatening populations of many species world-wide and are a hazard to life on earth.

Populations of mammals, birds, fish, shellfish, and reptiles have been shown to suffer from one or more of the following disorders: brain damage, cancer, premature death, reproductive problems (including failure to reach sexual maturity), abnormal development of reproductive organs, birth defects, thyroid dysfunction, severely weakened immune systems, and behavioural changes. The International Program on Chemical Safety (IPCS) sponsored by the World Health Organisation (WHO), recently completed a comprehensive review of the available scientific literature on EDCs(2). The report, published in August 2002, concluded that there is extensive evidence that

wildlife have been adversely affected by exposures to EDCs, and that the changes in human health trends, in some areas, such as lower sperm counts, increases in hormone related cancers, changes in birth ratios, and early onset of puberty in girls are sufficient to warrant concern. Whilst the evidence of direct causal mechanisms is still lacking, the report highlighted the strong plausibility that adverse trends in human health are linked to these chemicals.

One example of an EDC that caused massive environmental impacts is tributyltin (TBT). TBT is widely used as an anti-foulant paint on ships' hulls and has been found to masculinise female dogwhelks. As a result, affected dogwhelks are unable to reproduce and their populations have been decimated around the world. WWF is advocating for the development of screening tests for EDCs so that the hazards of compounds such as TBT can be identified before they are authorised for use and to prevent similar ecological disasters in the future.

WWF and Alternatives to Animal Testing

WWF supports the development of non-animal tests and believes that there is an urgent need for replacement, reduction, and refinement of the use of animals in chemical tests. With the significant strides being made in biomedical science there is now a great potential for alternative test methods to be developed. WWF recognises that animal tests can only provide indications of human toxicity and that existing animal methods have not necessarily been validated in accordance with current validation practices. There are therefore scientific as well as ethical reasons why animal tests should be minimised or eliminated in favour of non-animal screens and tests - wherever possible, as soon as scientifically appropriate.

WWF is committed to promoting alternatives to animal testing and to reducing the use of test animals. For example:

- In Europe, WWF has worked alongside animal welfare organisations including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Eurogroup for Animal Welfare in publicly pushing for governments to significantly increase funding into alternatives to animal tests;
- In the United States, WWF is providing advice to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, along with representatives from animal welfare organisations, on validating non-animal and animal screens and tests proposed for EDCs;
- WWF has called for safety testing to be prioritised and tiered, initially focusing on non-animal methods, persistence and bioaccumulation, existing data, computer models (QSAR), and *in vitro* techniques;
- WWF has pressed for increased openness and data sharing, to minimise duplicate testing, and for the phase-out of persistent and bioaccumulative chemicals without a need for toxicity tests(3); and
- WWF has urged the UK government to speed up the procedure for acceptance and validation of currently available alternative methods.

WWF looks forward to the day when future generations of humans and wildlife are safeguarded from chemical threats, and animal testing is committed to the annals of history. Until then, WWF believes that in the absence of effective, validated alternatives, limited animal testing is still needed to help ensure the long-term protection of wildlife and people throughout the world.

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References:

- 1) Allanou R, Hansen B, van der Bilt Y (1999) Public Availability of Data on EU High Production Volume Chemicals. EC Joint Research Centre. Institute for Health and Consumer Protection ECB. EUR 18996
- 2) Global Assessment of the State-of-the-Science of Endocrine Disruptors (2002) International Programme Chemical Safety, WHO, Geneva
- 3) A New EU Chemicals Policy- Some Key Arguments (2001)