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## **Position statement**

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# **Use of laboratory animals in chemical tests: WWF's answer to PETA's accusations**

WWF is involved in the animal testing debate because we have been pushing for the development of tests to identify hazardous chemicals such as endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), and to provide necessary safety data so that these chemicals can be more tightly regulated. Unfortunately, this cannot be achieved without safety testing.

WWF is deeply concerned that despite utterly inadequate safety assessments, over 30,000 untested man-made chemicals have been released into the environment. Data on the impacts of many of these chemicals is totally inadequate - and increasing numbers of scientific studies are demonstrating their harmful consequences for both humans and the wildlife.

For example, Beluga whales in the mouth of the US/Canada Great Lakes are having reproductive problems that appear to be associated with chemical contamination. In the past few months alone, over 3,500 seals have died in the North Sea from a virus thought to be caused by industrial chemicals. In 1988, 18,000 seals died of the same illness.

Since the 1970s the incidence of childhood diseases and other human health disorders that may be associated with exposure to toxic chemicals has risen dramatically. These disorders include learning disabilities, childhood cancers, testicular cancer, diabetes, and penis malformations, to name just a few.

We know very little about the hazards of most of the thousands of chemicals released into our environment. Too often effects have been discovered only through luck and coincidence. Based on careful priority setting, WWF considers as imperative to screen and test a limited number of the chemicals that are currently in use and new chemicals before they come onto the market.

We believe that non-animal methods, human epidemiological studies and field studies on wildlife should be used to the fullest extent possible in providing data on chemical safety. We support the development of non-animal tests and think the replacement, reduction and refinement of the use of animals in chemical tests is urgently needed.

WWF is calling for a substantial increase in funding of both research and validation of alternative methods of testing. Together with groups such as the Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, we have been publicly lobbying EU national governments to allocate more resources to non-animal testing. Similarly, WWF has urged the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to seek out and use validated alternatives whenever possible and to pursue the development and validation of non-animal tests.



Unfortunately until such time as a comprehensive range of non-animal alternatives is developed and validated, there will be sometimes little choice but to test chemicals on laboratory animals in order to protect a broader number of species, as well as current and future human generations.

WWF regrets PETA's stated goal of stopping the endocrine disruption screening and testing program in its tracks. PETA's position provides aid and comfort to those manufacturers who assure the public that their products are safe even when appropriate tests have not been conducted. This also is a disservice to members of both PETA and WWF who support our goal of reducing toxic threats to wildlife.

**For further information:**

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