



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Environment: Better information for citizens about major accident risks**

New rules that enter into force today will see EU citizens better informed about major threats posed by industrial plants in their immediate vicinity. The rules are part of an otherwise technical update of the [Seveso Directive](#), a key instrument in industrial risk management, which is being adapted to reflect recent changes in the international and European classification of chemicals. The Directive obliges Member States to draw up emergency plans for areas surrounding industrial installations where very large quantities of dangerous substances are to be found.

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: *"Seveso III will mean better protection against major accidents for citizens and the environment. It will also mean that citizens are better informed, and more involved in land-use planning decisions."*

In addition to the technical updates to take account of changes in EU chemicals classification, the main improvements for citizens are:

- Better access for citizens to information about risks resulting from activities of nearby industrial installations, and about how to behave in the event of an accident; this will also increase confidence in the functioning of these companies
- More effective rules on participation, by the public concerned, in land-use planning projects related to Seveso plants
- Access to justice for citizens who have not been granted appropriate access to information or participation
- Stricter standards for inspections of establishments to ensure more effective enforcement of safety rules.

From now on, public information about risks must be made available electronically. All establishments covered by the legislation will need to provide information about how alerts will be sounded, and about how citizens should act in the event of a major accident. When an accident happens, the relevant authorities will need to inform anyone likely to be affected by it and the main measures taken to address it. Changes to land-use planning laws will see the introduction of an appropriate "safety" distance in plans for new establishments and infrastructure near existing establishments. Procedural requirements for public consultation on projects, plans and programmes have been tightened. When authorities and establishments assess major accident potentials and adopt measures to address this, they will need to take better account of potential increased risks due to the proximity with other industrial sites and potential repercussions on nearby installations.

## Next Steps

Member States will have to apply these rules as from 1 June 2015, which is also the date when the new chemicals classification legislation becomes fully applicable in Europe.

## Background

The Seveso legislation on the control of major-accident hazards dates back to 1982. It obliges Member States to ensure that all operators covered by the Directive have a policy in place to prevent major accidents. Operators handling dangerous substances above certain thresholds must regularly inform the public likely to be affected by an accident, providing safety reports, a safety management system and an internal emergency plan. The legislation obliges Member States to ensure that emergency plans are in place for the surrounding areas and that mitigation actions are planned. Account must be taken of these objectives in land-use planning.

Seveso legislation is considered to have been instrumental in reducing the likelihood and consequences of major accidents involving dangerous substances, as the number of reported accidents fell by 10% between 2000 and 2008, notwithstanding an increase in the number of establishments. The approach has been copied worldwide.

The Directive covers around 10,000 fixed industrial sites using or storing dangerous substances in large quantities, mainly in the chemicals, petrochemicals, storage, and metal refining sectors. There is a tiered approach to the level of controls: the larger the quantities of dangerous substances present within an establishment, the stricter the rules (upper-tier establishments have bigger quantities than lower-tier establishments and are therefore subject to tighter control).

In 2008, the Council and the European Parliament adopted the [CLP Regulation](#) on the Classification, Labelling and Packaging of substances and mixtures, adapting the EU system to the new UN international chemicals classification (the GHS or Globally Harmonised System). This in turn triggered the need for adapting the Seveso Directive, since its scope is based on the former chemicals classification which will be repealed by the CLP Regulation by June 2015. This adaptation was the opportunity to improve other aspects of the directive including in particular inspections of establishments and public information, participation and access to justice.

## See also

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/seveso/index.htm>

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