

The UK needs a national Chemicals Agency

Safer, faster, better value for taxpayers

Chemicals regulation in the UK is broken. Businesses, academics and the public have all told us about their problems with the current chaotic system. The most recent chemicals strategy wasn't even published this century.

A national Chemicals Agency is needed to help get things back on track. Such a body would supercharge our ability to:

- **Protect human health and the environment** against both short- and longer-term risks across the life cycle of chemicals.
- **Drive innovation and economic growth** by giving businesses and researchers clarity over what is required of them, adapting promptly to new developments in testing and risk mitigation, and facilitating international trade agreements.
- **Deliver taxpayer value for money** by maximising coordination across government, with a well-resourced and skilled staff, to deliver a 'one substance, one assessment' approach.

Why is this important?

Every one of us interacts with chemicals every day – they are in the water we drink, the products we use and the air we breathe. The chemical and pharmaceutical industries turn over £50 billion and add £18 billion of value to the UK economy every year, while almost every business in the country is affected by some form of chemicals regulation.

These materials matter to individuals, businesses and the country as a whole so it is important the systems governing them work effectively. However, problems with the current system include:

- A short-term and reactive approach to risk
- A lack of clarity for business
- A lack of coordination leading to inconsistent decision-making
- Inefficiencies that are poor value for money
- Cumulative barriers to UK trade, investment and influence
- Uncertainty as post-Brexit changes to chemicals policy continue

Emerging issues, such as PFAS, also threaten the health of our citizens and our environment. Rather than reacting to a catastrophe, we believe it would be better to have a regulator that anticipates and proactively manages longer-term risks. This is key for chemicals as many of the potential problems that arise come from cumulative exposure over a sustained period.

Establishing the UK as a global science leader will require a more streamlined, coherent and effective regulatory framework – and a national Chemicals Agency. Right now we have a unique opportunity to realise those ambitions – and our estimates show that this could be achieved with a net neutral impact on the budget.



The gold, silver and bronze standard

We have identified three initiatives that would improve chemicals regulation in the UK if implemented, up to and including the creation of a Chemicals Agency.

The creation of a national Chemicals Agency would be the gold standard for a future UK chemicals regime, responsible to Parliament, but independent of any single department. It would:

- Provide a centralised home for chemicals information, monitoring data and technical evidence on chemicals made, used or shipped into the UK.
- Consider the life cycle of substances used in society to support regulation that furthers ambitions for a circular economy.
- Coordinate and provide advice and support to existing regulators.
- Act as a centre of excellence to attract and develop a skilled workforce.
- Liaise with national and international bodies to influence chemicals management and regulation.

The silver standard is to establish a dedicated research institute, the National Centre for Chemicals and Risk Research (CCRR). This would provide independent advice to the UK Government and other global organisations, while evaluating chemical safety, conducting research and identifying new approach methods, among other duties.

The bronze standard is a cross-governmental chemicals regulation training and networking programme. This could be delivered and accredited by third-party organisations and academic institutions quickly, tackling the skills shortage at relatively low cost in the immediate term.



	BRONZE	SILVER	GOLD
Table 1: Overview of three initiatives for improving UK chemicals regulations	Cross-governmental chemicals regulation training & networking programme	A new independent national Centre for Chemicals and Risk Research (CCRR)	National Chemicals Agency
BENEFITS	+	++	+++
A more expert and joined-up regulatory workforce	✓	✓	✓
Improved recruitment and retention due to training, accreditation and development opportunities	✓	✓	✓
More efficient assessment and decision-making	✓	✓	✓
Increased coordination across government departments	✓	✓	✓
Puts UK at forefront of regulatory science		✓	✓
Regulators stay at the forefront of scientific developments		✓	✓
Innovation supported by increased chemicals risk and risk management capability		✓	✓
Increased inward investment by promoting UK's innovative regulation		✓	✓
Enhanced UK influence on international chemicals policy and regulation		✓	✓
Cements UK as world leader in chemicals research, innovation and regulation			✓
Life-cycle approach to risk, allowing a truly proactive and long-term approach to protecting people and the environment			✓
Streamlined 'one-substance, one-assessment' approach			✓
Optimal regulatory responsiveness to emerging scientific developments			✓
Greater clarity and more rapid decision-making for businesses and innovators			✓
Minimisation of duplication of efforts and waste of resource across government			✓
Increased confidence among consumers & public in the safety of chemicals and products developed in the UK			✓
Trade benefits from increased global confidence and trust in UK regime			✓
Maximised innovation and inward investment due to cementing UK as world leader in chemicals research and regulation			✓
UK established as a leading influence on international chemicals regulation & policy.			✓
SETUP COSTS	£	££	£££
Potential for revenue generation	✓	✓	✓
Potential for cost neutrality			✓

Next Steps

What the next government can do

Time is of the essence and that's why we are calling on the next government to take six significant actions:

- 1 Commit to a national Chemicals Agency
- 2 Commit to a national Chemicals Research and Risk Institute (CCRR)
- 3 Immediately fund a programme of short training courses for civil servants
- 4 Release the long-awaited chemicals strategy
- 5 Commence negotiations for access to ECHA chemicals data
- 6 Provide a timeline for UK REACH reform

Find out more about these actions at rsc.li/agency

What you can do when elected



Table a question in Parliament about any of the above six points, emphasising the effect a lack of chemicals regulation is having on businesses in your constituency.



Write to the new Secretary of State for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, outlining your concerns and calling for urgent action on chemicals regulation.



Get in touch with us for more information at policy@rsc.org