

THE NETHERLANDS

Highlights of developments since the 3rd meeting of the WPMN (Nov 2007, Paris)

In November 2006 the Dutch government issued a cabinet view on nanotechnologies. The aim of this cabinet view is to indicate whether the frameworks necessary for responsible developments are adequate or in need of adjustment or revision. This assessment will be made on the basis of the main areas of Opportunities, Dealing with Risks, Ethical and Legal Issues, Research Agenda, Coordination and Support base and Communication. The view can be briefly summarised as follows: nanotechnologies are new technologies that are already the subject of a great deal of research worldwide and that are being increasingly applied. It is important that the Netherlands participates in this, not only by keeping up with the development of knowledge in the field but also by securing a position in the vanguard. Furthermore, we must be alert to the possible risks that nanotechnologies entail. The Netherlands will only be able to take optimum advantage of the opportunities by dealing cautiously and carefully with the associated risks.

Based on this cabinet view a.o. the following actions have been taken:

- An interdepartmental working group on possible risks of nanotechnology has been established, which will produce an action plan for both applications and risks of nanotechnology (June 2008) and a document for the Government on the risk strategy by the end of 2008.
- A National Observatory dealing with the possible toxicological risks of nanoparticles has been established at the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM). Its main tasks are signaling the major scientific developments on toxicological risks of engineered, insoluble, non-biodegradable free nanoparticles. Hereto it participates in (inter)national working groups (a.o. OECD, ISO, SCENIHR, EFSA, ICON, SETAC) and (networking)projects (a.o. FP-7) and informs government and professionals. The Observatory does not perform research itself, but advises on research agendas.
- The Netherlands Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI), arising from the NanoNed consortium which is active in the area of possible applications of nanotechnology, has started working on a National Research Agenda. This agenda will include a section on possible risks, and is expected to be finished mid 2008.

Work completed, underway or planned

1. Any national regulatory developments on human health and environmental safety including recommendations or discussions related to adapting existing regulatory systems or the drafting of laws/ regulations/ guidance materials

The Netherlands participate in the REACH CA Subgroup on nanomaterials.

The current opinion in the Netherlands is that the present regulatory framework in principle gives a good coverage; different aspects of production and products are at the same time subject to various Community provisions. Therefore, although there is no legislation specifically relating to nanotechnologies, generic legislation that applies to engineered nanosized materials in principle enables authorities to take prompt action if products pose a risk to health, safety or the environment. But since many knowledge gaps have been identified, and no data on which to determine the possible risks are available, it is not possible to assess the full extent to which the implementation of current regulations addresses any potential risks. In

short the legislation is adequate but the implementation of it is inadequate due to lack of specific measures, parameters or control devices.

2. Developments related to voluntary or stewardship schemes

The VNO/NCW (Business organization of the Netherlands) has taken the initiative together with the VNCI (United Dutch Chemical Industry) and has indicated they are working on a Letter of Intent to enter into a voluntary agreement with the Dutch government. Initiatives for a structural dialogue with multiple stakeholders has started in 2008. Update is expected before the 5th WPNM meeting in 2009.

3. Information on any risk assessment decisions

No information Provided

4. Information on any developments related to good practice documents

The SER (Dutch Socio Economic Council = existing of business rep., Union rep. and independent Academia) will be asked to advise on good practice on workplace exposure, start foreseen late 2008.

The Netherlands subscribes the Code of Conduct for responsible Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies Research, adopted by the EC (press release IP/08/193, Brussels, 8 Feb 2008).

5. Research programmes or strategies designed to address human health and/ or environmental safety aspects of nanomaterials

A survey (requested by the Ministries of Labour and Environment) has been performed to give insight into the places where people work with nanomaterials in The Netherlands. In addition, the measures that are being taken and the communication of “best practices” has been studied. The final report is expected in July 2008.

A working group of the Ministries of Agriculture (food), Health (consumer goods, medicine), Labour (working conditions), Economic Affairs, Environment (substances) and Transport, Public Works and Water Management will prepare a paper which addresses the risk management strategy on nanotechnologies (focusing first on nanoparticles). This paper will then be discussed with stakeholders (Business, NGO's United Trade Unions) amended and sent to parliament by mid 2008.

A national research agenda including a “risks section” is being drafted by the Netherlands Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI) and the National Observatory.

The Netherlands will participate in the Sponsorship Programme developed by the OECD WPMN and be a co-sponsor of the performance of toxicological testing for the development of a risk assessment dossier for cerium oxide.

6. Information on any public/stakeholder consultation

The Dutch cabinet view on nanotechnology includes the foreseen installation of a so called “broad commission” with stakeholders from both science and the public. Individual actions to start a public debate have already been undertaken e.g. between employers' organizations, NGOs and the government.

The SER (Dutch Socio Economic Council = existing of bussines rep. Union rep. and independent Academia) has been asked to comment on a study regarding the exposure to nanoparticles in the workplace. Result of this study expected early 2009.