



**GREENPEACE**

## COMMISSION PROPOSES ECO-LABEL FOR TOXIC FURNITURE

**September 19, 2003, Brussels** – Today, EEB, FERN<sup>1</sup> and Greenpeace alerted EU Environment ministers that a proposal by the EU Commission to award the European Eco-label to furniture containing hazardous chemicals, illegally logged wood and PVC threatens the integrity of the entire green labelling scheme. Next Wednesday 24 September EU government representatives have the final vote on the new Eco-label criteria for furniture,

The European Eco-label (The Flower) is meant to identify sustainable products, with reduced lifecycle environmental impacts, enabling consumers to make informed choices. But if the proposal for the furniture Eco-label remains as it stands, it will totally undermine this goal.

Draft criteria for the new Eco-label for furniture initially excluded furniture containing hazardous chemicals from the green labelling scheme. However, the final proposals from the European Commission would award a green label even for furniture which is creating serious problems for people's health and the environment. For example, the Eco-label could even be applied to furniture which:

1. is coated with PVC (up to 2kg of PVC coating for a 70kg piece of furniture); PVC is an unsustainable plastic, producing hazardous wastes and releasing hazardous chemicals during every stage of its lifecycle
2. contains hazardous chemicals, other than those carrying legally banning "risk phrases"; chemicals such as halogenated flame retardants and phthalates widely recognised as hazardous and specifically excluded from other Eco-labels
3. yields VOC<sup>2</sup> emissions above the WHO recommended precautionary levels for protection of sensitive groups;
4. may be partly made of illegally sourced wood

The environmental NGOs are deeply concerned that consumer products such as furniture can be rewarded an Ecological stamp of approval despite being potentially toxic and destructive to the environment during production, use and/or waste phases.

"PVC is one of the most environmentally harmful plastics", warned Jorgo Iwasaki-Riss of Greenpeace. "Many producers have successfully phased it out from their products – PVC is simply not necessary for furniture. It is bad enough that the industry remains free to use such an unsustainable plastic as PVC. To allow it to be labelled as environmentally friendly would be a sham." he added.

"What we see here is a huge loss of ambition for the Eco-label scheme. The retreat from the full lifecycle, precautionary approach to the 'minimum requirement by law' approach is clearly illustrated by the failure to go beyond minimum legal requirements of the Restrictions on Marketing and Use directive," said Melissa Shinn, EEB Eco-label co-ordinator.

"As the text stands now, consumers could in future buy Eco-labelled furniture made of wood originating from sources involved in illegal logging, conflict timber or land rights violation. This undermines the EU's intentions to tackle these problems" said Bérénice Muraille of FERN. "Without high-quality criteria, the Eco-label provides no incentive for the forestry industry to stop the unsustainable and illegal logging practices that threaten biodiversity and the communities that depend on forests for survival."

EEB, FERN and Greenpeace call on all government representatives of the Eco-label Regulatory Committee to **reject the criteria proposal** as it stands now in the interests of defending the credibility of the EU Eco-label scheme and protecting the health and sustainability of Europe and its citizens.

For further information: Melissa Shinn, EEB: +32 2 289 13 00, Jessica Wenban-Smith/ Bérénice Muraille, FERN: +32 2 736 8054, Jorgo Iwasaki-Riss, Greenpeace European Unit, +32 2 274 19 07

<sup>1</sup> FERN (Forest and the European Resource Network) promotes the conservation and sustainable use of forests and respect for the rights of forest peoples in the policies and practices of the European Union. Web: [www.fern.org](http://www.fern.org).

<sup>2</sup> VOC – volatile organic compounds, usually solvents