ecopa/CONAM consensus meeting of interest groups of national platforms

Ljubljana (Slovenia), Congress Center Hotel Mons, 10-12 June 2005

The representatives of the interest groups of national platforms for alternative methods to animal experiments were invited to a meeting by ecopa (European consensus platform for alternatives), which defines itself as an intermediary between the national platforms. About 30 representatives of 11 national platforms took part. In the invitation, the chairman of the meeting, Tiard de Cock Buning, had clearly stated that the meeting should not be understood as a scientific event with the main aim of gaining knowledge, or as a board or committee meeting with the aim of reaching a decision. Instead, the main purpose of the meeting should be to seek consensus between the different interest groups. Consensus should be reached on the classification of pain and suffering of experimental animals, as well as on their "moral status". All participants in this dialogue should respect each other's specific knowledge and values but at the same time they should find ways to discuss these.

Status of animals in number

So much about the theoretical background; now to the practical implementation: Before the start of the meeting, every participant was given a questionnaire. The interviewees should first sort animals into hierarchy by assigning them numbers. Fruit fly, nematode, frog, chimpanzee, fish, cat, mouse, rhesus monkey, chicken, dog, rabbit, rat should be assigned the numbers 1 to 10. The lowest status should be assigned number 1, the highest 10.

The same scheme was used to estimate the pain sensibility and the animals' capacity for suffering. If one thought that dogs are especially sensitive to pain, they should be assigned the number 10, and if one thought rats hardly feel pain, they should get number 1. Furthermore, questions regarding the acceptance of experiments that put animals under heavy or light strain, e.g. experiments that study colon cancer or experiments on hair loss in men, were ranked. Six animal species (dog, fish, monkey, nematode, mouse, bird) and four categories ranging from acceptable to not acceptable could be chosen from for the ranking.

Assessment of suffering based on personal opinion

It was unclear, on which basis the interviewees should pronounce their judgement. In the invitation it had been stated explicitly that the aims were not the collection of scientific knowledge like at a scientific congress. Instead, the aim was to find a consensus.

The questionnaire obviously aimed at assessing the subjective opinion of the different representatives of the interest groups with all their socio-cultural colourings, differing moral beliefs and personal preferences: it was thus a question of whether the academic researcher prefers dogs to cats, whether the government employee thinks that rabbits suffer more than chickens or whether the representative of industry thinks that it is justified to let fruit flies suffer a bit so that men may suffer less from thinning hair. And it was a question of whether animal protectionists think that research on colon cancer justifies very painful animal experiments, or whether such experiments should rather not be performed.

The problematic concept of the questionnaire, with its non-transparent objectives continued throughout the entire meeting. Both scientifically well-founded facts as well as ethical understandings that have already been reached were questioned. Therefore, it appeared that the status of animals should be completely renegotiated based on the subjective opinions and personal preferences of the participants. This impression became even stronger when the participants were asked to prioritise research areas and measures in the area of Refinement. Various participants commented that they did not necessarily have the required expert knowledge and that they found it more important to first speak about the Replacement of animal experiments. The chairman said this subject was on the agenda for the next day.

Replacement as exchange of animals

It became clear in the course of the meeting that a previously unknown interpretation of the term Replacement was meant: the replacement of one animal species by another. Numerous participants responded to this interpretation with disbelief and refusal. Until now, the professional community had clearly had the consensus that with regard to the 3R concept, the replacement of one animal species by another could -- in the best case -- be termed Refinement. Article 7 of the EU animal experimentation guideline 86/609, which is almost 20 years old, established that the animal...
Das neue europäische Chemikalienrecht und
der Verbraucherschutz

Erstes BfR-Forum Verbraucherschutz
Berlin, 23.-24. Juni 2005


I. Neue Konzepte für sichere Chemieprodukte. Wird der Verbraucher ausreichend geschützt?

Nach der geplanten REACH-Verordnung sollen die Risiken von ca. 30.000 Stoffen bewertet werden. Eine Risikobewertung, so Ursula Gundert-Remy (BfR, Berlin), setzt Informationen zur Gefährlichkeit einer Chemikalie und der Exposition des Verbrauchers durch diese Chemikalie voraus. Deshalb müssten, sobald eine Exposition für den Verbraucher angenommen werden kann, Daten zur Gefährlichkeit der Chemikalie vorliegen; dies betrifft insbesondere Informationen zu Krebs erzeugenden, Erbgut schädigenden und Fruchtbarkeit und Nach-