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## UK failure to create post-Brexit chemical regulations risks 'irreparable damage'

Government attempts to replicate EU system threatens innovation, warns industry



More than 95 per cent of manufactured goods contain chemicals © Charlie Bibby/FT

**Peter Foster** in London 3 HOURS AGO

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The UK chemicals sector has warned that attempts to create an affordable post-Brexit regulatory regime for the industry were floundering and risked causing “irreparable damage” to British businesses.

The frustrations emerged after more than 18 months of negotiations between industry representatives and the government over how to build a regulatory system for a sector that is vital to UK manufacturing. More than 95 per cent of manufactured goods contain chemicals.

After [Brexit](#), the UK quit the EU's "Reach" chemical management system but has repeatedly delayed the introduction of its own arrangements after a government [impact assessment](#) discovered it would cost the industry £2bn to duplicate the safety data already held in Brussels.

However, attempts to broker a deal with industry to reduce the cost of re-registering 22,400 chemicals with a copycat UK "Reach" system run by the government's Health and Safety Executive are failing to bear fruit, according to senior industry figures.

Tom Bowtell, the chief executive of the British Coatings Federation, called for a "reset" in the negotiations, adding that talks on creating a lighter-touch model were "not addressing many of the concerns that led to that pause in the first place".

The industry argues it is needlessly expensive to duplicate registrations where chemicals have already passed safety tests in the EU, but for legal and intellectual property reasons, the underlying data for those registrations is not available to the UK regulator.

However, conservation and environmental groups have said that unless the UK regulator is in full possession of the data, it cannot regulate effectively.

But Bowtell said a "suboptimal" application of UK Reach could cost British industry billions of pounds, and accused the government of lacking the "application and creativity" required to find a solution.

"If genuine progress is not realised quickly, there is the risk of irreparable damage not just to the UK chemicals sector but to downstream users and formulators of chemicals," he said at the BCF's annual conference.

Geoff Mackrill, the boss of Hull-based Teal & Mackrill, a speciality paints manufacturer that employs 70 people, said the prospect of UK Reach requiring full duplication of existing EU chemical registrations could cost him crucial suppliers.

With some chemicals only occurring at trace levels in certain products, he warned that several European manufacturers would inevitably decide it was too expensive and time-consuming to duplicate their EU registrations to serve a smaller UK market.

“Our products are made up from a large menu of chemicals, but if an EU supplier takes one of those chemicals off the menu, then we have to reformulate, which is both expensive and difficult,” Mackrill added. “The fear is that we’ll lose the ability to make products and innovate.”

This year the government [announced](#) a three-year extension to deadlines for completing full UK Reach registrations, with these now required in October 2026, October 2028 and October 2030 depending on the tonnage and toxicity of chemicals concerned.

Steve Elliott, the head of the Chemicals Industry Association, the sector umbrella organisation, echoed Bowtell’s concerns, saying that while the deadline extensions were helpful they reflected the “very limited progress” in negotiations over UK Reach.

Elliott said the UK approach was at odds with recent pledges by Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, to boost advanced manufacturing through “smart” regulation that was designed to foster innovation.

“Unfortunately, such an outcome appears currently beyond us with regard to Reach and, whilst the clock ticks, companies are having to make choices over future investment amounts and locations,” he said.

The CIA said it remained committed to working with the government and conservation organisations to secure a workable deal, but added: “We need tangible progress . . . and we need it fast.”

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said it was committed to a regulatory regime for chemicals that delivered high levels of protection.

“We have brought Reach into UK law and put in place systems to ensure the safe, effective management and control of chemicals which protect human health and the environment,” a spokesperson added.

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