The Council’s assessment

This objective will be very difficult or not possible to achieve by 2020, even if further action is taken. No clear trend in the state of the environment can be seen.

Use of chemicals around the world is increasing, with growing production in countries where regulation in this field is limited. Although positive trends can be seen for individual substances, we are still a long way from reaching the objective. Mercury, cadmium and persistent compounds already occur widely in the environment and in products and buildings.

In addition, we have a poor understanding of the hazardous properties and environmental occurrence of many substances, and also of the effects on humans and the environment of exposure to several substances at the same time. Good progress has been made in reducing risks in the workplace, but allergy and other forms of hypersensitivity remain a major problem.

How can the objective be met?

Greater preventive efforts are needed to avoid dangerous substances getting onto the market and affecting people and the environment. The REACH Regulation and other new EU legislation will significantly improve knowledge about the properties of chemicals and the risks they entail.

This legislation can reduce the use of hazardous substances, and the prospects of achieving the objective will depend crucially on how it is implemented.

In Sweden, there need to be better controls on chemicals in products. Companies must step up the pace of efforts to replace and phase out dangerous substances. There is also a need for ‘green chemistry’ to minimize the environmental impacts of substances and the ways in which they are produced. Speedier action must be taken to clean up contaminated sites around the country, with both state and private funding.