

Commission launches consultation on responsible research in Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies

The European Commission has today announced a public consultation on responsible nanosciences and nanotechnologies research. The consultation will provide input for a Recommendation to the Member States on a possible Code of Conduct for this emerging area of science, which the Commission will put forward later this year. Contributions are expected from a broad cross-section of European society, including the scientific community, industry, civil society, policy-makers, media and the general public.

"Nanosciences and nanotechnologies have the potential to drive growth and jobs in Europe, and their development and use should not be delayed, unbalanced or left to chance" said Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research. "It is important that we pursue this knowledge with full understanding of the possible implications of these new areas of science, and that we do so openly and involving all concerned. The consultation process launched today shows the Commission's commitment to developing the potential of nanosciences with appropriate safeguards."

The potential economic impact of nanosciences and nanotechnologies (NST) research has been highlighted by analysts, with forecasts varying between US\$150 billion by 2010 (approximately €110 billion) according to a 2002 study by the Mitsubishi Institute, and US\$2.6 trillion (approximately €1.9 trillion) by 2014 according to a 2004 Lux Research study. The latter, more optimistic, scenario would imply that the market for nanotechnology-based products would be larger than the information and communication technology market and would exceed the future biotech market by ten times. Estimated worldwide public funding for nanotechnology R&D in 2004 was equivalent to €3.3 billion, reaching €5 billion in 2006.

At the same time, some, though not all, areas of nanoscience come with very specific issues, related to properties such as their minuscule size, their ability to cross natural bio-boundaries or potential to connect living creatures and man-made materials and systems. Therefore the responsible management and control of nanosciences has become a very specific region of the science and technology landscape in the last decade, particularly as regards ethics, safety and environment and the fundamental rights of individuals, such as the protection of personal data.

A European Code of Conduct for responsible nanosciences and nanotechnologies research is part of the European Commission's ambition to promote a balanced diffusion of information on nanotechnology and to foster an open dialogue, involving the broadest possible range of interested parties. This code of conduct would express basic principles on which to base future developments within nanotechnology research and would invite Member States and interested parties to take concrete action for a safe development and use of nanotechnologies. The consultation launched today, which will last until 21st September, will collect input on the scope of the Recommendation and the principles on which to base further developments in this field.

Background information:

- Internet site of the consultation:
<http://europa.eu/sinapse/directaccess/science-and-society/public-debates/nano-recommendation/>
- Consultation paper on following website:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/consultations/list_en.html