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## **Authorities Discuss Insurability of Nanotechnologies – Regulatory Gaps Identified, Risk Monitoring Requested**

Government officials from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein met at the invitation of Liechtenstein for the 4<sup>th</sup> International Nano Authorities Dialogue. The participants discussed current developments in nanotechnologies, while the focus was on legal and technical issues about the insurability and regulation of nanotechnologies. The Authorities Dialogue series has been organised by the Innovation Society, St.Gallen since 2008.

### **Liechtenstein hosts the 4<sup>th</sup> Nano Authorities Dialogue**

Renate Müssner, Minister of Environment and Health of Liechtenstein and Helmut Kindle, Director of the Office of Environmental Protection, welcomed the participants. The minister emphasized in her introduction that the dialogue among representatives of the authorities of the German-speaking countries is of great benefit as the developments in the field of nanotechnologies progressed rapidly and nanomaterials may already be found in many areas of our lives. Between the poles of ensuring a safe development for humans and the environment and allowing innovations to be implemented on the other hand, cross-border dialogue among authorities, business representatives and associations as envisaged by the Nano Authorities Dialogue provides an excellent opportunity for an informal and non-bureaucratic exchange.

### **Nanotechnologies must be insurable**

Christoph Meili, CEO of the Innovation Society, St.Gallen, emphasized that the insurability of nanotechnology products and applications will become more important in view of the large and increasing variety of nano-products on the market. Nanotechnology-enhanced sunscreens, textiles or packaging materials must be insured in order to be put on the market. The protection of public health and the environment from potential nanomaterial hazards poses a great challenge for the authorities as only insufficient risk information is available for many manufactured nanomaterials.

Risk engineering and risk management experts of different direct and reinsurance companies outlined the risk profile of nanotechnologies from the perspective of the insurance sector. Their explanations made it clear that nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials have been a priority issue for many insurance companies. Being partners of the industry and of the authorities, insurers strive to contribute to a safe and sustainable application of nanotechnologies. At the same time, however, manufactured nanomaterials must be subject to increased scrutiny, and repeating the asbestos tragedy ("long-tail" risks) must be avoided.

### **Expert calls for monitoring and identifies regulatory gaps**

Prof. Rainer Schweizer from the University of St.Gallen compared nanotechnologies with genetic engineering from a regulatory point of view. As he referred to the similarities and differences between these technologies, he mentioned that in contrast to genetic engineering, there is still no specific legislation for nanotechnologies. He identified regulatory gaps in particular in chemicals legislation and occupational health and safety legislations in Switzerland and other European countries. As a consequence, he argued that the potential risks of manufactured nanomaterials for human health and the environment must be thoroughly and continuously monitored

Renate Paumann from the Lebensministerium in Vienna presented the current activities at the European level. Nanomaterials are implicitly covered and regulated under REACH. On the basis of the diverse inputs and discussions, the participants explored possible synergies and ways of cooperation between public authorities, insurance companies and the industry. Besides the manufacturer's self-

responsibility, the exchange of safety information between the industry and the authorities and along the value chain plays an important role to ensure that risks are identified in an early phase and measures can be taken proactively.

**Box: The Nano Authorities Dialogue**

The Nano Authorities Dialogue is an international platform for government officials, industry representatives and associations from Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. The platform aims to foster an informal cross-border dialogue and exchange of experiences on current issues about nanotechnologies. The platform has been organised and moderated by the Innovation Society, St.Gallen since 2008 on behalf of the respective host authorities.



Dr. R. Müssner (left), Dr. H. Kindle (right). © 2010 The Innovation Society, St.Gallen

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