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Korean Regulatory Reform of the Chemical Substance Management System in Response to REACH

The Korean Ministry of Environment is in the process of reforming the chemical substance management system in response to the REACH and other international chemical substance regulation and to maintain the national competitiveness in such area.

It is the understanding of the Korean Ministry of Environment that:

- European Union (the "EU" launched a new chemical substance management system, the REACH (the Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemical) as of June 2007, by consolidating forty (40) different regulations that were outstanding prior to the enactment thereof.
- The aim of the REACH is to improve the protection of human health and the environment and to strengthen the competitiveness within the EU's chemicals industry.
- It requires all companies manufacturing or importing chemical substances into the EU to register these substances with a new European Chemicals Agency in Helsinki, Finland.
- It is a very strict law and may work as a strong barrier to the trade of not only chemical products, but also automobiles and electronics that include chemical products.

The "REACH Task Force Team" in the Korean Ministry of Environment is currently preparing a plan that will improve the system for a rational production of information on chemical substances and an intensification of harmful chemical substance management, which is expected to be devised by November 2008.

The plan discussed so far involves:

- increasing the number of categories for examining the toxicity of chemical substances as the current number six (6) is extremely low compared to the OECD standards, which is thirteen (13);
- differentiating the examination categories according to the amount of production and import of the new chemical substances: and
- requiring the manufacturers or the importers to submit information on toxicity of hazardous substances, such as carcinogenic substances and mass-produced chemicals in advance.

The Ministry of Environment regularly holds the Forum for the Advancement of Chemical Substance Management with specialists in each area to discuss measures to reform the regulatory system. The plan for the reformed regulatory system is expected to be established by the end of December 2008. Afterwards, the Ministry of Environment is planning to amend the law by 2010, and enforce the amendment after 2012.

Although the new regulation system stated above is not likely to be implemented as strictly as the EU REACH, it is expected that the degree of chemical substance regulation will be gradually intensified after taking into consideration the international trend of the regulation system and the present conditions of the industry. Therefore, it is believed that sufficient advance preparation is necessary for the manufacturers and importers.

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