



## Media Release

For immediate release  
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### **European Commission finally approves in vitro methods to replace cruel rabbit skin irritation test**

The BUAV has welcomed the announcement by the European Commission of the adoption into EU regulation of an alternative to the cruel rabbit skin irritation test (Draize) test. This means that it is no longer permissible to use rabbits to test the irritation of chemicals. The ruling will have immediate positive implications for animals that would have otherwise been used to test chemicals under the new REACH legislation.

The rabbit skin irritation test is over 60 years old and has been widely criticised by both animal groups and scientists. It typically involves shaving the backs of rabbits and applying a potentially irritant chemical onto the skin to assess the reaction over several days. Animals can suffer painful sores and blisters before being killed. The EU currently uses over 10,000 animals, mostly rabbits, in these tests, every year.

The alternative test has now been written into an amendment to the Test Methods Regulation, a recipe book for safety tests used for chemicals, biocides and cosmetics. The new test is an in vitro method using skin donated from human volunteers. It is commercially available as EpiSkin, EpiDerm and SkinEthic. It has been in development for over 20 years and was validated by European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) in April 2007. It has also subsequently been shown to be more effective at predicting human skin reactions than the rabbit test it replaces.

Animal protection groups throughout Europe are disappointed that it has taken over two years for a valid and commercially available method to receive regulatory approval in the EU. This purely bureaucratic process was not intended to take so long and calls into questions the European Commission's commitment to reducing animal use, since the method could have been written into the new Test Methods Regulation which was adopted in May 2008. The adoption of the new alternative test should also mean that the rabbit test is automatically deleted from this Regulation. However, the Commission failure to simultaneously remove the original test in the Test Methods means that rabbits might still be used unnecessarily.

**Chief Executive of the BUAV, Michelle Thew** said: "We are delighted that this method has finally been accepted by the European Union as suitable for replacing the cruel rabbit skin irritation test. The adoption of this new in vitro method should prevent suffering for over 10,000 animals in the EU every year. However, we are very disappointed that this process has taken over 2 years. The test was validated in April 2007, and yet the European system has slowed down its adoption until today. Thousands have rabbits have died due to bureaucracy. We must

not let this happen again. And the EU must immediately delete the animal tests from the test methods regulation to avoid confusion.”

**ENDS**

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**Notes:**

The BUAV has been campaigning for over 100 years to achieve a world where nobody wants or believes we need to experiment on animals. We are committed to achieving our aims through reliable and reasoned evidence-based debate