Introduction

REACH is the new European Community Regulation on chemicals which came into being in 2007. It regulates the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals.

In our daily work we have discovered the need to explain the REACH-Regulation in layman’s terms. In a short time many industry players have developed a need for a fundamental understanding of the new REACH-Regulation. Therefore, an online training course, eReach was developed by a project team in cooperation with our European partners. The goal of this online tutorial was to explain the basic mechanisms and the new terms that came along with the new REACH-Regulation. The UBA (Federal Environment Agency) was an active member of this project team.

After the regulation began in 2007, the UBA wanted to support all REACH players in Germany by creating an online expert platform. A follow-up project called ReachConnect was therefore created. This presentation will give an overview of these two projects that accompanied the REACH-Regulation, including an explanation of the tools and methods which were used.

1. eReach

eReach is an online training course about the European regulation REACH that was instituted on the first of June, 2007. The Reach-Regulation is considered one of the strictest chemical regulations worldwide.

REACH concerns most of the manufacturing companies in Europe. In 2006 when the UBA started to participate in this running project, most companies didn’t know a lot about the legal obligations that they had to fulfill according to the new regulation.

The goal of this e-learning-tool was to boost awareness of the new regulation and to create a better understanding of the specific approach of the provisions within the regulation.

eReach was implemented for a large target group. That means employees of companies of any kind who are using chemicals or trading with chemicals. This includes employees who are not experts in the chemicals, for example employees in areas such as sales and marketing or buying and organization. However eReach was not only implemented for the management of companies but rather for employees of agencies that are charged with control activities.

eReach should create enough background knowledge to cope with detailed manuals/guidance documents of helpdesks, organizations and other official bodies. These documents are the basis for the correct execution of the REACH-Regulation.

The support of that tool was initiated by the (DEPA) Danish Environment Agency. Until recently partners were involved with their own efforts. The German Environment Agency also supported the project. It evaluated the prototype, and financed the implementation of the German version.

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The special feature of eReach is that it not only refines and provides information, but also teaches. The didactic concept of the e-learning is based on converting complex legislative content into easy to understand, animated graphics. This 'translation' of content 'from text to figures' has not yet been explored in teaching on legislation and thus is an innovative approach. And the benefits of all eLearning content are used: distance learning independent on time and location, deciding which learning content is relevant, and it can repeated as often as desired.

eReach is on [http://ereach.dhigroup.com/](http://ereach.dhigroup.com/)

Figure 1

This is an example from eReach, where the terms are explained. The text on the slide also has audio. The graphics are repeated, wherever the explained term is the focus.
Figure 2  
Example from eReach, here a term is explained
Source: Umweltbundesamt www.ereach.de

eReach is offered in English, German and Danish. Anyone interested can order a CD version from the German Federal Environment Agency. The online tool eReach and the CD version are free of charge. The content is made available as flash files. Two modules are used on the website, “Introduction into Reach“ and “Risk background“. Learning content is available in four chapters about “Risk background“. You learn in ten chapters in the module “Reach introduction“. Every chapter contains exercises and solutions.

2. ReachConnect

In order to introduce REACH to all Member States, we have also established a helpdesk. This helpdesk can be consulted by companies about their obligations and responsibilities in the Reach process. The German Environment Agency offers information and help instructions about Reach on the website www.reach-info.de.

Thanks to the good experience with the project eReach, the section IV2.3 Reach in the UBA generated the idea for the project „ReachConnect“ in 2008, in which a discussion with experts via internet is possible. The main idea of ReachConnect was to organize webinars (online seminars), to educate, to promote discussion with other participants or experts, and to share knowledge.

The beginning of the project was marked by an inventory of requirements. The next step was to analyze the market for a Virtual Classroom software. Then we had to choose the software for use in the project. We had a good partner, who helped to design the first master webinar. This partner also advised our team in the implementation and assessment of the webinar.
The German Federal Environment Agency invited people from companies and institutions, to take part in the „PBT Assessment under Reach“ webinar (meaning chemicals which are persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic). We did the invitation via the website reach-info.de. Interested individuals got information about what a webinar is and which technical conditions are necessary for taking part.

In our search for a software solution, we especially looked into a low technical limit. Because we decided on Elluminate Live!, we had the following conditions: internet, headset and java. Video was not our focus, since bad performance was often a problem. The participants get an eMail, where they find a link to our virtual classroom. They enter this room by signing their names, which are then shown in the classroom.

To prepare the webinar, we offered a technical introduction to Elluminate Live! for all participants, in order for them to get confidence in working with the virtual classroom functions, so they can focus on the content when the webinar is running. All webinars are led by a moderator. The tutors show slides on the whiteboard and invite the participants to give feedback. To give reactions, it is possible to either write on
the whiteboard or to use feedback buttons. Participants can either speak into a microphone or write opinions in the chatroom.

The webinar took place in April 2009 with 15 participants from the business sector and the government. It was a good decision to work with only a few participants: everyone had a chance to ask questions and to discuss ideas. The PBT webinar had an introduction to the theoretical model. At the end of the theory, everybody was invited to ask questions and to discuss. We collected all questions and themes from the lively discussion that ensued. After this, we took a break. At that time the tutors began to prepare answers to the questions which were asked. After the break the tutors answered the questions. In the second part we practiced a PBT assessment. Then, the participants again had the possibility to ask questions. The whole time for the webinar was about 2 two hours.

The difference with a live presentation is the increased interaction between the instructors and the participants. After a screen presentation, one is tired earlier. That’s why the tutors often asked the participants for contributions and feedback. The communication needs more time than in a live presentation. If an instructor has a yes-or-no question for everyone, the participants can simply use the yes or no button.

The webinar was recorded after all participants agreed. This record is on the server and the record can be played like a film. We are also able to produce a multimedia file of the record and can play the file independent of the server. Because of the high number of requests to see the webinar, we repeated it three times.

We also offer webinars on other topics. In the other webinars we use more on the functionality of software. For example, to demonstrate a software, we used application sharing, the instructor shares an application on his computer with all participants. In another part of the webinar we used the survey function, or provided a guided tour of the web.

The feedback after the webinars was very positive. This project was a great success.

3. Conclusion / summary

The UBA projects eREACH and REACHConnect are available to the player in the REACH process as a free offer. The players were taught in learning and using the specification of REACH. One of the important goals was to help the REACH player in understanding and using the restrictions of REACH. With eREACH our goal was to provide all players with an opportunity to understand the basic concept of REACH, and to understand their role in it.

REACHConnect was based on the knowledge of experts, which was exchanged with our knowledge of online instruments. The interest of players on webinars was enormous and the feedback was very good. The participants wanted more of such offers. One of the keys for success in this project was that the idea for using virtual classroom came from the experts themselves, not from an IT department.