

# Chemicals Harming Arctic Animals WWF says

GENEVA - Toxic chemicals are harming Arctic animals including polar bears, beluga whales, seals and seabirds, the environmental group WWF said on Thursday.

It said pollutants such as flame retardants, pesticides and fluorinated chemicals made Arctic wildlife vulnerable to health problems including immune suppression and hormone disturbances.

"We can no longer ignore the proof that chemicals are damaging the health of wild animals," said Samantha Smith, director of the Swiss-based group's international arctic program.

The WWF, formerly known as the World Wildlife Fund, said the chemical contamination of the Arctic threatened the survival of many of the region's animal species, who also faced possible habitat and food supply loss due to climate change.

It appealed for "urgent and significant strengthening" of European Union legislation designed to protect people and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals found in products like paint, detergents, cars and computers.

The bill, known by the acronym REACH, has drawn criticism from the United States and other countries who say its provisions could hurt trade and be hard to implement.

Among health effects, the WWF said the immune systems of polar bears had been disrupted and there were signs of weaker bone growth. Bears in the Barents Sea with high levels of toxic PCBs suffered disruptions to thyroid hormones.

"The bodies of some belugas from the St Lawrence estuary in Canada are so contaminated that their carcasses are treated as toxic waste," it said, adding that chemicals such as flame retardants were compounding problems caused by older pollutants.

The WWF said its report focused on documented health problems in Arctic creatures, building on a report in February highlighting the high levels of pollutants in the Arctic.

The Arctic is far from industrial centres but many long-lasting chemicals get swept north by winds and ocean currents and build to damaging levels in fatty tissues of creatures in the region.

