



Wednesday, April 6, 2021

Ursula von der Leyen  
European Union Commission President  
Berlaymont, Rue de la Loi 200  
100 – Brussels  
[ec.president.vdl@ec.europa.eu](mailto:ec.president.vdl@ec.europa.eu)

David Sassoli  
President of the European Union Parliament  
Parlement européen  
Bât. PAUL-HENRI SPAAK  
09B011  
60, rue Wiertz / Wiertzstraat 60  
B-1047 Bruxelles/Brussel  
[david.sassoli@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:david.sassoli@europarl.europa.eu)

Bjorn Hansen  
Executive Director of European Chemicals Safety  
Telakkakatu 6  
P.O. Box 400,  
FI-00121 Helsinki, Finland  
[executive-director@echa.europa.eu](mailto:executive-director@echa.europa.eu)

Stella Kyriakidou  
Commissioner of DG Sante  
European Commission  
Directorate General for Health and Food Safety  
B - 1049 Brussels  
[cab-kyriakides-contact@ec.europa.eu](mailto:cab-kyriakides-contact@ec.europa.eu)

Re: Sale and distribution of potentially toxic nanographene masks on the European market

Dear Commission President von der Leyen, European Parliament President Sassoli, Mr. Hansen, and Ms. Kyriakidou,

Ensuring public health at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance. Those efforts must include the precautionary regulation and continued safety of personal protective equipment, including masks. Face masks represent a critical tool in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and are the first line of defense for those on the pandemic's frontlines — but they must be safe masks. Based on recent development in Canada and an examination of the European market, we have determined that these potentially toxic masks, are for sale on the EU market. We ask the Commission to take urgent action. To allow unassessed and potentially unsafe masks onto the market has serious health implications and may dangerously undermine public trust in mask-wearing.



Five weeks after [Belgian authorities recalled masks containing titanium dioxide and silver nanoparticles](#), the Canadian health regulator, Health Canada, [issued an urgent advisory](#) on April 2, 2021, warning that face masks containing nanographene particles are potentially toxic and may pose a risk to human health — particularly lung health, since wearers may inhale particles. The advisory removes all nanographene masks from Canadian markets, asks provinces to stop distribution, and includes a recommendation that consumers stop wearing such masks.

The advisory comes after a preliminary assessment of research establishing toxicity concerns on valid animal models. It follows complaints from individuals wearing graphene-coated disposable masks produced by the China-based Shengquan Group under the ‘healfiber’ brand, one of several mask brands that include graphene. Over 30 million ‘healfiber’ masks were given to school children, teachers, daycare workers, and other workers in the province of Quebec and mandated to be worn for extended periods of time. Anecdotal reports from wearers included the feeling of ‘breathing in cat hairs’ and having trouble breathing. [Leading nano risk and innovation experts have condemned the decision to put graphene nanoparticles in facemasks without adequate prior safety assessment.](#)

Shengquan Group boasts that they currently manufacture [upwards of 2-5 million such nanographene masks daily](#) and ship them worldwide. The current global market for disposable masks amounts to 1.5 trillion masks per year, and [companies are increasingly adding nanoparticles to masks](#) - including graphene, [silver, and metal oxides](#) — under the guise of “antiviral measures.”

Our organizations’ research indicates that similar masks containing nanographene, including those under the Shengquan ‘healfiber’ brand, are [available across the European market](#) and are in use in the wider public — including the President of the European Union Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. In the photo below, President von der Leyen is shown in the EU Parliament premises, wearing a mask from Shengquan Group containing the same ‘healfiber’ nanographene material that prompted the widespread recall and ban by Canadian authorities.



*The above photo was taken from the Shengquan Group Facebook page, where the company highlighted President von der Leyen wearing the product.*



President Von der Leyen is not alone. With the recent internal guidance that Members of the European Parliament must wear disposable masks, there is concern that these nanographene masks may have been more widely distributed in European institutions. Given their confirmed presence on the market in high quantities, it is also safe to further assume that across Europe, people, including children, workers, and medical staff, are currently using these potentially toxic masks *right now*.

Given the potential toxicity concerns leading to the removal of nanographene-containing masks from the Canadian market, the European Union must urgently examine the circumstances of these products' availability on the European market — including their safety, legality, and the appropriateness of biocidal claims for nanographene while investing in comprehensive research to examine their potential health impacts. Such measures must also be extended to personal protective equipment labeled with “antiviral” claims, as there are similar concerns regarding other nanomaterials used in facemasks, including nanosilver and nanometal oxides. Reusable solutions, including FFP2 masks for the general public, [are available on the market](#) and offer, in some cases, even better protection (e.g., face pieces with filters).

The undersigned organizations call upon President Von der Leyen, for her own and other's health, to refrain from wearing nanographene masks and ensure that action is taken to protect European citizens from nanoparticle risks. The European institutions and European countries should urgently follow Canada's precautionary example and take immediate action to ban the sale and use of facemasks and other personal protective equipment containing nanographene, other nanoparticles, and more broadly any chemical of potential concern whether or not under nanoform.

#### Signatories

David Azoulay, Environmental Health Director  
Center for International Environmental Law

Jim Thomas, Research Director  
ETC Group

Dorota Napierska, Chemicals Policy and Projects Officer  
Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe

Elisabeth Ruffinengo, Health and Environment Advocacy Manager  
Women Engage for a Common Future