

Europe moves against 'untrue' sunscreen labelling

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Sun worshippers were warned today not to believe all the claims they read on sunscreen products.

Promises of "sun blocker" and "total protection" against harmful rays simply are simply untrue, said the European Commission.

Any suncream that suggests it offers full protection for babies and young children is misleading consumers, it added.

Brussels wants vague and confusing labels banished – including "broad spectrum", "100% anti-UVA/UVB/IR", "strengthened protection UVA" and "UVA absorption spectrum 30/UVA 30".

If the suncream industry does not accept today's EU recommendations to standardise and clarify their labelling claims, the Commission is ready to bring forward legally-binding regulations.

Commission Vice-President Gunter Verheugen warned: "The current situation is untenable. The best way forward is a recommendation to which industry commits to label sunscreen products properly.

"This will give consumers clear and coherent information without creating unnecessary red tape for industry."

One current confusion is over two different types of hazardous ultra-violet radiation: UVB causes sunburn, while UVA causes premature skin ageing, increases the possibility of skin cancer and interferes with the immune system.

The problem is that the so-called "Sun Protection Factor" (SPF) commonly used as an indicator, only protects against UVB sunburn radiation and not the more harmful UVA.

Some tanning products do protect against both sorts of rays, emphasised the Commission, but in many cases outdated labelling makes it difficult for consumers to understand the risks they could be taking.

EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said: "Consumers must be made fully aware that no sunscreen product can provide 100% protection against hazardous UV-radiation. There are serious health risks and consumers need to be fully informed about what sunscreens will and will not do for them".