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**Press Release**  
**28 February 2011**

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## **Flanders breaks world record with the largest chemistry lesson**

*562 youngsters launch Chemistry Week*

Mechelen, 28 February 2011 – Flanders set a new world record in the Guinness Book of Records today. As a start of Chemistry Week, 562 enthusiastic students from 18 primary schools took up the challenge of creating the Largest Chemistry Lesson at Technopolis®. The attempt to set a record is the initiative of essenscia, the federation of the chemical industry and life sciences, and Technopolis®, the Flemish science center. Under the direction of American chemistry professor Bassam Shakhshiri the students made bath salt, hair gel and toothpaste. This was the official launch of Chemistry Week. At a variety of different locations around the country youngsters aged 10 to 18 were able to take a close look at the wonderful world of chemistry.

The bailiff François Meeus confirmed the new world record: 562 youngsters followed a chemistry lesson at Technopolis® for one hour and they succeeded in making bath salt, hair gel and toothpaste. This breaks the record that was set in the Netherlands in 2010.

*“Technopolis® is very proud of setting the world record in the largest chemistry lesson. By joining forces with professor Shakhshiri, essenscia, de Artesis College and the teenagers who were present, we were able to produce a unique result,” said Erik Jacquemyn, chief executive officer of Technopolis®.*

2011 is a celebratory year worldwide for chemistry. The United Nations named 2011 the International Year of Chemistry. essenscia is organising a series of activities in Belgium that give a broad public and, above all, youngsters the opportunity to discover chemistry. The goal of the sector federation is to arouse enthusiasm for chemistry and science among 7,500 teenagers via Chemistry Week. This is necessary, because the chemical sector is faced with an important wave of ageing of the population and is struggling with a lack of new young talent.

*“A study carried out by K.U.Leuven revealed that an estimated 10,000 out of 62,000 employees in Belgium will retire over the next five years. Our sector will need to convince thousands of young people to choose a job in the chemical industry. Communicating effectively with teenagers is of essential importance therefore. Chemistry is often a big unknown factor, while chemistry that is applied to make products that we use in our everyday life offers a solution for a host of different problems,” recounted Frans Dieryck, managing director of essenscia vlaanderen.*

Flemish minister of Innovation, Ingrid Lieten and professor Shkhashiri gave the starting signal for Chemistry Week: *"It was exactly 100 years ago that Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. During the same year, 1911, Ernest Solvay founded the International Association of Chemists. Today we are faced with great social challenges such as global warming and an ageing population. We need young people with fresh ideas to find solutions. As part of my approach, I try to ensure that more young people opt for scientific studies so that we can maintain our leading position in the world in the future. The fact that Ernest Solvay was a Belgian who acquired world renown with discoveries in the field of chemistry is something we can be proud of. And while Marie Curie was not Belgian, she was a woman. I hope that this fact will inspire young girls to think about a future in the world of research."*

During Chemistry Week, the American professor Bassam Z. Shkhashiri will put on 15 spectacular chemistry shows. Shkhashiri is professor of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and author of different books about chemistry demonstrations. He is known for his 'Science is Fun' shows in shopping centres, schools and other public places where he is able to reach tens of thousands of people with his message. He has won several different awards for his indefatigable efforts to communicate a passion for science to young people. In 2011 professor Shkhashiri was named President-Elect of the American Chemical Society, the biggest scientific association in the world.

*Anyone who is interested in attending a show by professor Shkhashiri may turn up on Saturday 5 and Sunday 7 March at 14h00 at Technopolis® in Mechelen.*

*You can find an overview of all the activities taking place during the International Year of Chemistry on [www.chemie2011.be](http://www.chemie2011.be).*

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