

Persistent organic pollutants: Provisional agreement on the world's most dangerous pollutants

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The EU is toughening the rules on the most lasting and polluting chemicals. The Romanian presidency of the Council today reached a provisional agreement with the European Parliament on updating the regulation on persistent organic pollutants, the UN-agreed list of dangerous substances. This regulation will help protect people and the environment against these chemicals.

The agreement will now be submitted for political endorsement by EU ambassadors in the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee.

The agreement we have clinched today means that we have reached an important milestone in protecting human health and our environment. This is about limiting the damage from the world's most dangerous hazardous chemicals. By eliminating their production and banning their use, we can achieve maximum protection.

Grațiela Leocadia Gavrilescu, Romanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment

The recast proposal ensures alignment of the existing regulation with the latest amendments to the Stockholm Convention, which provides the global legal framework for the elimination of the production, use, import and export of persistent organic pollutants. Several amendments align the regulation more closely with the general EU legislation on chemicals. As a result of these changes, there will be more clarity, transparency and increased legal certainty for all parties involved in the implementation of the regulation.

The new rules will maintain the existing high level of protection of human health and the environment in Europe, but some tasks foreseen under the regulation will be transferred from the European Commission to the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) in Helsinki, as this is expected to reduce the overall costs and to expand the scientific knowledge available for implementation.

Under the agreement, the flame retardant decaBDE is added to the list of substances and the unintentional trace contaminant value is set at 10 mg / kg for cases where decaBDE is present in substances. In addition, the unintentional trace contaminant value is set at 500 mg/kg for the sum of all BDEs, including decaBDE, where they are present in mixtures and articles. A review clause was inserted to assess all impacts on health and the environment of the limit value of 500 mg/kg for the sum of all BDEs.

Furthermore, specific exemptions concerning the use of decaBDE are introduced for aircrafts, motor vehicles and electronic equipment also in case of imports.

Background

On 22 March 2018, the European Commission adopted a proposal to recast the regulation on persistent organic pollutants. The Council adopted its position on the regulation on 28 November. Negotiations with the European Parliament started on 4 December and ended in today's agreement.

The agreement will be submitted to EU ambassadors for endorsement on behalf of the Council, following technical finalisation of the text. Parliament and Council will then be called on to adopt the proposed regulation at first reading.

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