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REACH: Federal Environment Agency urges regulation of octylphenol

Agency first to propose endocrine disrupter for evaluation according to EU chemicals law

Germany has become the first EU Member State to identify the endocrine disrupting octylphenol as a Substance of Very High Concern and has proposed it be included in the dossiers of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). Scientific research has shown that octylphenol affects the endocrine system in fish and thereby impairs their development and reproduction. Minimal levels of concentration of a few millionths of a gramme are enough to inflict damage. Should other Member States consent to the German proposal in December, octylphenol will be considered a Substance of Very High Concern and added to the REACH Candidate List, which is the first step towards the substance requiring authorisation- or limited use at the least- throughout the EU. Octylphenol is used in the production of varnishes, lacquers, adhesives or tyres.

UBA considers it a basic requirement for endocrine disruptors to be subject to stricter regulation. The EU REACH chemicals regulation is one means of achieving this: individual endocrine disruptive substances can be identified as substances of concern, which classifies them in the same category as substances that are carcinogenic or teratogenic. However, the REACH instrument has not been implemented yet. "We must not only talk about evaluating endocrine disrupting substances, we must take action," says UBA President Jochen Flasbarth. UBA is taking a first step by identifying octylphenol.

Octylphenol (chemical name: 4-tert-Octylphenol) are in the family of alkylphenol compounds. The most well-known chemical in the group is the endocrine disruptor nonylphenol, in which the presence of ethoxylates in textiles were traced in a recent Greenpeace study. Nonylphenol and its ethoxylates are banned in a number of applications in the European Union. Octylphenol, on the other hand, is not. In addition to the applications mentioned above, a derivative of the chemical (Octylphenol-ethoxylate) is also used in natural gas extraction by means of fracking, where it is mixed with water and introduced into rock under high pressure so as to release natural gas. Businesses, environmental and consumer associations, public authorities and interested citizens have 45 days to react to the UBA proposal, for REACH is a procedure that involves broad public participation. In a next step a committee of ECHA Member States takes a position on the matter. Once a substance is put on the Candidate List citizens can request information from their merchants free of charge as to whether the substance is contained in a given product.

Comments on the UBA proposal regarding 4-tert-Octylphenol may be submitted in English via http://echa.europa.eu/consultations/authorisation/svhc/svhc_cons_en.asp
For more information on reporting obligations and a sample enquiry form about substances of concern in products click here: www.reach-info.de

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