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Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons – Polluters! Toxic! Unavoidable?

EU to pass new caps on PAH upon urging from Germany

The European Commission wants to make consumer products safer and is proposing standardized caps for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). PAH are present in many products such as tyres and toys. Their properties give rise to concern and are harmful to health and the environment. "We heartily welcome the Commission's initiative to reach an appropriate ruling on polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons two years after Germany had made such a proposal," said Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency. The Federal Environment Agency is presenting a new background paper on the sources, effects and risks of PAH to provide information to the public about these compounds.

Whether found in mousepads, toys or thongs, independent laboratories have regularly detected PAH in consumer products, and often at concentrations that are not allowed for, say, tyres. "Many of the PAH traced are carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic", said Flasbarth. Moreover, they are persistent in the environment and can accumulate in organisms. The Federal Environment Agency therefore urges the maximum possible restriction of the input to the environment of chemicals with this combination of properties (persistence, bioaccumulative potential and toxicity) through legal regulations.

Upon an initiative from Germany, the EU Commission has made proposals to reduce PAH based on the REACH chemicals regulation. A standard cap would apply to consumer products, banning any products that have a concentration of carcinogenic PAH of more than 1 mg/kg. This would also concern products that have either been insufficiently regulated or not at all. Jochen Flasbarth said, "Whereas the EU has had a cap on PAH in tyres for years, there are no such caps for products like clothing, handles, toys or children's items. The Federal Environment Agency therefore welcomes the EU's proposal to promote environmental and consumer safety."

At the same time, UBA is presenting a new background paper about the sources, effects and risks of PAH. Readers will learn how to avoid these chemicals. The paper concludes that the individual provisions governing PAH up to now are not sufficient to effectively contain PAH emissions to the environment and its traces in consumer products. This is why legislation on these substances is needed at European level.

Further information and links:

The new background paper *Polyzyklische Aromatische Kohlenwasserstoffe - Umweltschädlich! Giftig! Unvermeidbar?* [*Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons - polluters! Toxic! Unavoidable?* (summary in English) is here: <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/4372.html>

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