ECHA proposal to restrict the marketing of formaldehyde releasing articles[1)]

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On 11.01.2019, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) published a proposal to restrict the marketing or use of all products with a formaldehyde concentration greater than 124 µg/m³ (0.1 ppm) in a test chamber specified with the test conditions defined in Standard EN 717-1.

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Since 2014, formaldehyde has been classified as a potential human carcinogen (Carc. 1B) according to Regulation (EC) No. 1272/2008 (CLP). This substance is one of the chemicals with high production volumes and a wide range of applications. Formaldehyde is mainly used as a chemical intermediate in the production of formaldehyde-based resins / binders and as basic material for synthesized chemicals. The most commonly produced substances / products made of formaldehyde include urea-formaldehyde resins, phenol-formaldehyde resins and melamine formaldehyde resins. These formaldehyde-based polymers are used as binders, particularly in the wood materials industry and in the production of synthetic glass fibers, and are one of the most common sources of formaldehyde release.

A number of EU member states (including Italy, Austria, Germany, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Lithuania, Greece) already have legislation (E1 quality) to minimize consumer exposure to formaldehyde-releasing wood-based materials. In addition, some EU countries (e.g. Germany, Austria, Denmark) regulate the maximum permissible formaldehyde emissions from wood-based products such as furniture. However, these measures are not yet implemented by all EU member states. An EU-wide harmonized regulation to limit formaldehyde emissions from products does not yet exist.

According to the scope of an ECHA proposal[1] to minimize the release of formaldehyde from products, articles made of formaldehyde-containing or formaldehyde-releasing materials are affected. Furthermore, products which are made of plastics such as polyoxymethylene or polymers based on methyl isocyanate are also affected.

Due to the voluntary commitment of the European wood materials industry and an already established testing method, a transitional period of 12 months is considered to be realistic until the implementation of the ECHA proposal. In addition, it should be taken into account that with the implementation of a new version of the Chemicals Prohibition Ordinance[2] and the newly defined reference method for testing wood-based materials (DIN EN 16516) in Germany, a significant tightening (factor 2) in relation to the marketability of wood-based materials comes into force.

Based on our long term testing experiences, even products made up of E1 classified wood-based materials can exceed the formaldehyde concentration threshold of 0.1 ppm required in the test chamber test in the scope of testing the complete article. The reason for the increased formaldehyde values is usually a consequence of further processing (e.g. generating cutting edges, drillings, bends with increased use of binders or moisture additives) of the raw / starting material.

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- Test chamber tests on products and wood-based materials for the release of formaldehyde under standardized conditions in accordance with EN 717-1 and DIN EN 16516.
- Cause analysis of non-compliant products, support in quality improvement.
- Tests of formaldehyde emissions on wood-based materials and processed construction products as notified testing body (NB 0197) in accordance with the Construction Products Regulation 305/2011.

1) https://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/13641/rest_formaldehyde_axvreport_en.pdf/2c798a08-591c-eed9-8180-a3c5a0362e37

2) https://www.bundesanzeiger.de/ebanzwww/wexsservlet?session.sessionid=78f2869cd1efe962577977340c825bba&page.navid=detailsearchlisttodetailsearchdetail&fts_search_list.selected=a9a-073c4b4e28ab5&fts_search_list.destHistoryId=28139

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