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**Press Relation Officer:** Martin Ittershagen

**Deputy Press Relation Officer:** Stephan Gabriel Haufe

**PR-staff:** Marc Rathmann, Martin Stallmann;  
Office: Doreen Redlich

**Telephone:** +49 340 2103 -2122, -6625, -2250, -2507, -2669

**Address:** Federal Environment Agency, P.O. box 1406, 06813 Dessau-Roßlau

**E-Mail:** [pressestelle@uba.de](mailto:pressestelle@uba.de)

**Internet:** [www.umweltbundesamt.de](http://www.umweltbundesamt.de)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/umweltbundesamt.de](https://www.facebook.com/umweltbundesamt.de)



## The end is nigh for flame retardant HBCD

### Ban to become effective after one-year transition period

**A worldwide ban on the production and use of the flame retardant HBCD will be introduced soon. The resolution was adopted at a UN chemicals conference in Geneva. The chemical is to be added to the list of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) under the Stockholm Convention. HBCD stands for Hexabromocyclododecane. Up to now it has been used mainly in insulating wall panels and in future certain uses will be allowed for a limited period. Substitute materials do however exist. Alternates to insulating materials such as mineral rock wool can also prevent the use of HBCD. The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) welcomes the decision. Says UBA President Jochen Flasbarth: "It is a great success that the environmentally harmful flame retardant HBCD will now no longer be produced nor will its use be allowed anywhere in the world. This is a logical conclusion since the EU has already classified this chemical as a Substance of Very High Concern under the REACH chemicals regulation."**

HBCD is an environmental toxin that is highly accumulative in organisms, very persistent and is thought to be toxic to reproduction. It is transported across great distances and even accumulates in regions far from any industrial activities, for example in Arctic regions. It thereby meets all of the criteria of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the so-called Stockholm POPs Convention. It is mostly used as a flame retardant in insulating wall panels and also as an auxiliary material in cement, in electrical and electronic products, in textiles and in upholstered furniture.

The Sixth Conference of the Parties to this convention will add hexabromocyclododecane (HBCDD or HBCD) to Annex A (Elimination), which is part of the POPs list. The Expert Committee of the Stockholm Convention has confirmed the POP properties of the chemical and thus paved the way for its worldwide ban under the Convention. The decision will officially be adopted on 9 May 2013 and thereby enter into force this month, with a one-year transition period. The decision means that the production and use of the chemical will be banned. Furthermore, the parties to the convention may make an exception for the production and use of HBCD in insulating wall panels. This is to ensure that there is a sufficient amount of suitable substitute materials and other alternatives available until the ban takes effect. This exception is for a limited time only and applies only for insulating wall panels in buildings. Jochen Flasbarth comments, "UBA recommends use of thermal insulation materials that are less harmful to the environment and

health or even doing without any flame retardants, for example by using mineral wool. We could thereby speed up the process of removing HBCD from the market."

Negotiations between representatives of the EU Member States and the European Commission aimed to achieve a balance between regulations under REACH and the worldwide ban under the Stockholm Convention. It is especially important that no wastes containing HBCD are deposited in developing countries once the chemical is added to the Convention. Developing countries are appealing for technical and financial aid to implement the necessary monitoring and adaptation measures.

In 2008 the European Union identified HBCD as a Substance of Very High Concern due to its PBT properties (persistent, bioaccumulative, toxic), and it was included in Annex XIV of the REACH Regulation in 2011. The production and application of HBCD in the EU is thereby only possible if applications are made and temporary authorisation is granted through the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) by August 2014.

### **Further information and links:**

Information about the Stockholm POPs Convention is available here:

<http://chm.pops.int/>

Information about the Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) is here:

<http://www.iisd.ca/chemical/excopsops/2013/>

Dessau-Roßlau, 8 May 2013