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Success for REACH

New obligations to report for businesses: European Chemicals Agency publishes list of Substances of Very High Concern

Since a short time ago, businesses have had an obligation to report on substances that pose a certain risk to mankind and the environment. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has for the first time published a list of substances of very high concern. Reasons for inclusion are that the substances are: carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic for reproduction, and the list also includes persistent, bioaccumulative, toxic substances (PBTs); that is, substances which persist in the environment and the human body, accumulate there, and are toxic. As a result, the European Chemicals Regulation REACH requires businesses to advise their industrial customers if their products contain one of the chemicals identified on the list in concentrations of more than 0.1 percent. "I encourage all consumers to make use of their right to information and to require merchants to make information about substances of very high concern available. Trade and commerce should demand safe products from manufacturers", said Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA).

REACH requires authorisation of substances of very high concern, with the objective of getting manufacturers to gradually replace them with less problematic substances and technologies. Inclusion on the so-called Candidate List is only an indication of its status as one of very high concern and not of an authorisation obligation, although it is the first step in such a procedure. The member states of the European Union (EU) laid the foundations for the list, for they submitted the recommendations for inclusion on the Candidate List.

UBA's first suggestion for inclusion on the Candidate List was anthracene, a chemical from the group of polycyclical aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). Anthracene is a PBT and was selected as a "priority hazardous substance" in the European Water Framework Directive on account of its harmful impact on bodies of water. Other substances of very high concern are the plasticisers (phthalates) Diethylhexyl (DEHP), Dibutyl (DBP) and Benzyl butyl (BBP), and the brominated flame retardant hexabromocyclododecane (HBCDD), which was traced in the environment and human blood in many experiments.

The 15 substances on the Candidate List are merely a start. The EU Member States and the ECHA are working on new recommendations for inclusion on the list, with a focus on PBTs, chemicals relevant to bodies of water, and those with endocrine disrupting properties.

More information about REACH is here: www.reach-info.de/. The complete list of substances of very high concern for authorisation can be accessed here: http://echa.europa.eu/chem_data/candidate_list_table_en.asp

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