

EU postpones action on toxic e-waste

Members of the European Parliament delayed action on removing toxic substances from everyday electric and electronic (EEE) products. They confirmed a compromise deal with Member States for the Directive on the Restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electronic equipment (RoHS).

The Directive is supposed to ensure the restriction of hazardous substances in everyday products and after years of studies showing the dangers of certain substances MEPs and Member States have, in the view of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and its members, missed a significant opportunity to protect human health and the environment.

Christian Schaible, Chemicals Policy Officer at the EEB, was disappointed: „A lot of taxpayers' money has gone into scientific studies which have recommended restricting many new substances in electronic and electric equipment. Unfortunately, this appears to have all been ignored due to some chemicals industry lobby pressure.“ The compromise also drops the cautious approach taken initially by

members of the Parliament's Environment Committee regarding nanomaterials. They now say there will be no new substances seen as 'problematic' shall be restricted under today's new proposal. The EEB was pleased to see that member states and MEPs recognised the added value and complementary nature of RoHS and chemicals legislation REACH, and that Member States who take environmental and health protection objectives seriously can initiate future restrictions of hazardous substances.

On the downside EEB was disappointed to see the flawed stance on which EEE would be covered within the scope of restrictions with little of the 'open scope' remaining. This move will not allow for comprehensive eco-design measures, which would help

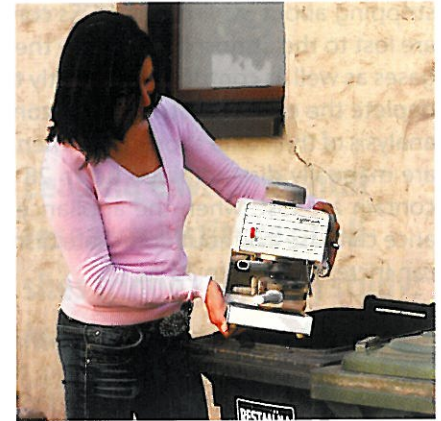


Photo: Zentek

ensure all future EEE are designed to be eco-friendly during their entire life cycle (i.e. from production to recycling).

It is now in the hands of Member States and the Commission to act. The EEB believes that RoHS could be a tool for creating a state-of-the-art and socially responsible eco-design legislation, with the right incentives for product innovation while minimising risks for people and environment. The substance restriction review should therefore start without delay and reward leading market players who have already 'designed out' toxics.

Material shortages still hitting plastics converters

„Plastics processors in Europe are still suffering despite improvements in overall business conditions“, said Alexandre Dangis, speaking about the mounting raw material cost increases sustained by Europe's plastics processors.

The head of the industry's Brussels organisation, European Plastics Converters Association, believes that this will potentially slow down recovery in the industry for next year.

Alexandre Dangis: „For some plastics we are facing price increases of up to 30 % in the period November 2009 to November 2010. There are still widespread reports of material and additives shortages and processors not being able to get the material to ena-

ble them to deliver on their projects.“ A key background factor has been the increased number of dubious 'Force Majeure' declarations.

A solution must be found

As previously announced Alexandre Dangis advised converters to legally challenge some of these 'Force Majeures' at national level: „We will certainly keep a very close eye on this development.“ Added to this, the surge in demand in China is sucking away material to feed a plastics industry hungry for more and supplies are moving to this part of the world. Alexandre Dangis: „I'm expecting discontinuity in supply in Europe to extend at least until the first quarter of next year.“ Speaking at a Marine Litter Workshop in the European Commission he added: „At the same time Europe

is exporting large volumes of plastics waste to the Far East and one has to wonder if plastics recyclate will not be of a more strategic importance for European converters in the years to come. European Politicians in Brussels will announce very soon their plans on Resource Efficiency for Europe.“

But Alexandre Dangis questioned the political will in Brussels to keep manufacturing in the EU: „A solution must be found to ensure for appropriate material supplies being it plastics raw material, additives or plastics waste.“ It makes no sense from a sustainability point of view to continue to increase and stimulate the exports of European plastics waste – paid for by the consumer – and which is benefitting business and employment in other parts of the world and hurting our industry in Europe.



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