

Persistent organic pollutants

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In accordance with Article 8(4) of Regulation No 850/2004 on persistent organic pollutants, the Commission presents a report on the review and update of the second European Union Implementation Plan.

It recalls that under the 2001 Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the EU is required to develop a plan for the implementation of its obligations under this Convention. The first European implementation plan was developed in 2007 and updated in 2014. The review and update of the second implementation plan has become necessary to further address (i) the inclusion of a number of new persistent organic pollutants into the Stockholm Convention, and (ii) the technical and legislative progress made in the area.

In the light of the obligations stemming from the Stockholm Convention and taking into account the situation in the European Union, the implementation plan outlines 30 actions that are needed to meet the obligations. 8 actions are new and address in particular the newly 8 listed chemicals. 9 actions are continuous actions and 13 actions were already listed in the previous implementation plan and are still ongoing since they have not yet been completed.

Progress achieved

Significant progress towards the elimination of POPs has been achieved. Production and use of all POP substances is prohibited with some minor exemptions. A main challenge for the EU is to eliminate POPs from the waste cycle and remaining stockpiles as these still present a major emission source.

The release of POPs due to unintentional production remains one of the most important issues to be tackled in the EU. Several actions are thus dedicated to the development of corresponding measures with the goal to reach a further reduction of POP emissions. Prevention of the formation of unintentional POPs through the development of processes and technologies that avoid their formation should mainly be addressed in the area of industrial production but also cover domestic sources such as diffuse incineration sources. There is still need for additional research and technological development.

The report notes the following:

- although the production and use of the polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) tetraBDE, pentaBDE, hexaBDE and heptaBDE has been phased out due to regulatory measures and their replacement by decaBDE, their presence in waste of electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) is still a challenge in the EU. There are indications that only few full-scale e-waste recycling facilities separate plastics containing PBDEs as required by EU legislation. Therefore, there are some doubts whether the capacity of EU recycling plants for separation of PBDEs containing plastic from other plastic are currently sufficiently developed to separate a major part of PBDE containing plastic waste stream. Data suggest that the flow of plastics recovered from WEEE and containing PBDE is not currently being properly controlled in European recycling operations;

- further efforts are required to meet the objective under the Stockholm Convention of a phase-out of the use of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) by 2025. Information about current amounts of PCB equipment and PCB wastes in the EU showed that there are still significant quantities of PCB equipment in use. The quantities of PCB that were used in open applications is unknown, as is the quantities of products containing PCBs still in use or capable of emitting to the natural environment;

- there is limited on-going production of perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, its salts and perfluorooctane sulfonyl fluoride (PFOS) in the EU. The use of PFOS in the metal plating industry is the main remaining source for PFOS releases from an intended purpose. Alternatives and substitutes have already been investigated for this use, which need to be implemented to completely phase-out the use of PFOS. The identification and management of sites contaminated by hexachlorocyclohexane (HCH) waste represents a challenge within the Union. An updated assessment revealed that deposited HCH wastes within the EU might amount up to 1.8 to 3 million tonnes. Seventeen Member States have identified contaminated land as an issue within existing national implementation plans, with further action needed to help address this issue. A coordinated strategy for the identification of contaminated sites and for their environmentally sound remediation may be necessary.

Monitoring and reporting

The report states that there is a knowledge gap on the chemical burden, despite the fact that Member States' authorities, research organisations and EU bodies are making significant efforts to monitor numerous chemicals in various matrices (water, air, biota, soil, human milk, etc.). This occurs because the chemical data generated by the monitoring activities are not being collected, managed and assessed in a coherent and accessible manner. To address this gap, an information platform for chemical monitoring data has been established at the European scale and a coordinated and integrated approach to collecting, storing, accessing and assessing of data will be ensured in future.

The report also states that several Member States have not met their reporting obligations and need to improve.

Lastly, the Commission considers that the EU should develop mechanisms for better coordination between the bilateral aid programmes of the Commission and those of the Member States with regards to POPs in order to ensure that the available resources are used more efficiently. To increase awareness and demonstrate the support provided by EU financial instruments that are relevant for POP-related action, specific information could be provided on the POP specific Commission website.