

Hazardous substances

Electronic goods to be made safer after EP votes to strengthen EU rules

The European Parliament adopted a final legislative agreement revising EU rules on hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (1). While the Greens/EFA group believed the legislation could have been made stronger, the group welcomed the revised rules as an improvement on the current situation. After the vote, Greens/EFA MEP **Jill Evans** (Plaid Cymru), who was the EP's rapporteur on the legislation, said:

"The revised rules adopted today will make electronic goods safer for the environment by facilitating restrictions of further hazardous substances in the future. While we clearly would have preferred even stronger legislation, the final compromise represents a clear improvement on the current situation.

"The revised rules introduce a clear methodology for future restrictions of hazardous substances that is complementary to and independent of existing EU rules on chemical substances (REACH). Importantly, we have identified the next generation of hazardous substances to be acted upon: PVC and halogenated flame retardants (2). While we clearly would have preferred restrictions on these substances now, this legislation paves the way for such restrictions in the future. This should be a clear signal to the market to continue its phase-out of PVC and halogenated flame retardants rather than wait until future restrictions.

"The extension of the scope to all types of electronic goods is another crucial development (3). This creates legal certainty and extends the scope to goods that were previously not covered - e.g. toys with an accessory electronic function or extension cables - thus increasing the level of protection.

"Finally, we managed to introduce a specific reference to nanomaterials in the review for further substance restrictions and have thus ensured that they will no longer escape the oversight of the regulator."

(1) Recast of the directive 2002/95/EC on restrictions of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment.

(2) The current law prohibits four heavy metals (lead, cadmium, mercury and hexavalent chromium) and two groups of brominated flame retardants (PBBs and PBDEs). The new law explicitly highlights three PVC softeners (DEHP, BBP and DBP) and one brominated flame retardant (HBCDD) for priority consideration with regard to future restrictions.

(3) The scope will be extended to all electric and electronic equipment within 8 years (with some exceptions) - although the EP environment committee wanted the extension to take place sooner (within 3 ½ years).

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Jill Evans

Member

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