ECHA proposes to restrict intentionally added microplastics

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**ECHA has submitted a restriction proposal for microplastic particles that are intentionally added to mixtures used by consumers or professionals. If adopted, the restriction could reduce the amount of microplastics released to the environment in the EU by about 400 thousand tonnes over 20 years.**

**Helsinki, 30 January 2019** – ECHA has assessed the health and environmental risks posed by intentionally added microplastics and has concluded that an EU-wide restriction would be justified. If adopted, the restriction could result in a reduction in emissions of microplastics of about 400 thousand tonnes over 20 years.

ECHA’s assessment found that intentionally added microplastics are most likely to accumulate in terrestrial environments, as the particles concentrate in sewage sludge that is frequently applied as fertiliser. A much smaller proportion of these microplastics is released directly to the aquatic environment.

The persistence and the potential for adverse effects or bioaccumulation of microplastics is a cause for concern. Once released, they can be extremely persistent in the environment, lasting thousands of years, and practically impossible to remove. Currently it is not possible to determine the impact of such long-term exposure on the environment.

Data available on effects is limited, particularly for the terrestrial environment, which makes risk assessment difficult. Due to their small size, microplastics and nanoplastics – even smaller particles that are created from the further degradation of microplastics – may be readily ingested and thereby enter the food chain. The potential effects on human health are though still not well understood.

Overall, the use of microplastics in products that result in release to the environment are not adequately controlled.

ECHA’s proposed restriction targets intentionally added microplastics in products from which they will inevitably be released to the environment. The definition of microplastic is wide, covering small, typically microscopic (less than 5mm), synthetic polymer particles that resist (bio)degradation. The scope covers a wide range of uses in consumer and professional products in multiple sectors, including cosmetic products, detergents and maintenance products, paints and coatings, construction materials and medicinal products, as well as various products used in agriculture and horticulture and in the oil and gas sectors.

ECHA has assessed the socio-economic impact of the proposed restriction and is aware that the restriction is likely to result in different costs depending on the type of product affected. However, implementing the restriction is expected to be cost-effective in all sectors, including the agricultural sector, identified in the proposal as the biggest source of intentionally added microplastics.

Several EU Member States have already introduced bans on the use of microplastics in certain types of products, largely concerning wash-off cosmetic products.

ECHA has published the restriction proposal on microplastics at the same time as its restriction proposals for formaldehyde and for siloxanes D4, D5 and D6.