

Press information**INDUSTRY VIEWS ON THE EU RISK ASSESSMENT OF NONYLPHENOL**

Because the EU risk assessment is primarily based on theoretical calculations of environmental exposure, it concludes that nonylphenol residues from the use of nonylphenol ethoxylates (surfactants used industrially and professionally for their excellent detergent and emulsifying properties) present a risk to the environment. As a result, the EU Commission rapporteur is proposing risk management primarily through marketing and use restrictions on these surfactants. CEPAD, the representative industry group for these products, agrees that industry must manage the potential risks of their products, but does not agree that the proposals under consideration are the best way to do so.

Available monitoring data on European rivers demonstrate that there is generally no risk from the use of these surfactants, except in specific cases where there are releases of inadequately treated sewage. Further, risk assessments in other parts of the world have concluded there are no significant risks from the use of nonylphenol ethoxylates.

Contrary to widespread claims that nonylphenol does not biodegrade and persists in the environment, the risk assessment report acknowledges that the substance is inherently biodegradable and breaks down to carbon dioxide and water; that there is no evidence of a build-up of the substance in the food chain; and that fears that its weak hormone-like activity may present a general risk to the public are unwarranted. Further, commercially used surfactants derived from nonylphenol display no hormone-like activity.

The EU risk assessment also recognises that residues of these surfactants can be effectively treated and eliminated in conventional sewage treatment plants with biological treatment. Thus the means of preventing risks to the environment are commonly available and their effectiveness can be controlled via emission limits and environmental quality standards. This is the principal reason why CEPAD does not agree with the rapporteur's proposals for risk management through restrictions on marketing and use.

As a principle, in cases where the environment can be protected by proper waste treatment of chemicals that benefit society, users should be free to choose the products they need, unfettered by use regulations. This ensures European industry remains competitive within an international context, as other regions do not impose any use regulations.

Where waste treatment facilities are inadequate to handle such surfactant residues, they will also be inadequate to handle the many other residues in effluents from domestic and industrial sources. Imposing restrictions on one specific chemical may be politically expedient but does not address the more important problem of inadequate sewage treatment.