

Detergent firms in sustainability check-up

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European detergent industry association Aise on Wednesday released first performance data under a sustainability charter adopted in 2004. Aise said the results would provide benchmarks for future annual reporting.

The 2004 charter requires companies to put in place systems for assessment and review of sustainability. It also asks signatories to report regularly on performance against ten green indicators.

To date, 28 manufacturers and retailers have signed the charter. The number is expected to grow substantially, Aise said on Wednesday. The first performance report covers data for just over half of EU production, including 81% of charter signatories' EU production.

Among the first year results, Aise reports that signatories purchased 16.2kg of poorly biodegradable organic ingredients (PBOs) per tonne of production. They also consumed 1.3 gigajoules of energy, emitted 80.9kg of carbon dioxide, produced 10.2kg of waste and purchased 78kg of packaging - all per tonne of production.

The charter is one of the latest in a series of green initiatives by the sector, including an only partially successful voluntary agreement with the EU between 1998 and 2003.

Energy consumption and use of PBO ingredients were reduced under the agreement, but the industry struggled to meet targets on detergent use and packaging.

Unlike the agreement, the charter does not include targets. Aise director of communication Valerie Sejourne stressed that its aim was to instil a life-cycle mindset in the industry. Another agreement with the commission is not currently planned, she told ENDS.

The initiative expands annual reporting from household products to the sector's whole portfolio. It uses performance indicators more directly under control of the industry by relating results to tonne of production.

A separate consumer education campaign called Washright will continue to run, aimed at getting consumers to use detergents in a more environmentally friendly fashion.

Greenpeace expressed scepticism about Aise's efforts. "The results of voluntary initiatives are usually very, very unremarkable and no substitute for binding targets," a spokesperson told ENDS.

Follow-up: A.I.S.E. (<http://www.aise-net.org/>), tel: +32 2 230 8371, plus press release (http://www.aise-net.org/infoday06/downloads/material/20061128_Press_release.pdf), full report (http://www.aise-net.org/infoday06/downloads/material/SusReport_06.pdf) and charter background (http://www.aise-net.org/infoday06/downloads/material/Charter_sus_cleaning.pdf).