

Legislation prompts health-related detergent enquiries

06-Jul-2007

Legislative changes prompted a rise in the number of health-related enquiries to companies' product carelines in 2006, according to data in the second annual sustainability report of the European association for the soap, detergents and maintenance product industries (AISE).

According to the chairman of AISE's sustainability charter steering group, David Walker, analysis of calls to such carelines has confirmed that many were prompted by publicity around adoption of the REACH Regulation and new labelling requirements to indicate the presence of allergens under the EU Detergents Directive.

Some 12,000 calls concerning "real or perceived" health concerns were received in 2006 to carelines in the 28 countries covered by AISE's sustainability charter, compared with 4,525 in the previous year, although such calls still account for less than two per cent of the total number of calls to carelines.

Stakeholders, whilst supportive of the initiative, are calling for more information on chemical use together with "deeper performance analysis". Mr Walker says such feedback will be taken on board when the initiative's indicators are reviewed in 2008.

In particular, he noted that the existing indicator on the safety assessment of ingredients, which relies on the number of substances assessed under the "human and environmental risk assessment" project for laundry detergents, will be "carefully looked at" to see if it can be substituted or supplemented by an indicator also applicable to other product types.

In 2006, the tonnage of "poorly biodegradable organic (PBO)" compounds purchased per tonne of production rose from 16.2kg to 25.4kg, accounted for by the increasing substitution of phosphates by zeolites and polymeric co-builders in anticipation of regulation to phase out phosphate use, as well as the trend towards selling more concentrated products. Nevertheless, PBOs account for just 2.5% of total chemicals used and Mr Walker conceded that a more "meaningful" indicator of environmental impact may need to be found.

The sustainability charter, launched in 2004, comprises ten key performance indicators against which signatory companies must report progress. Companies are required to meet minimum "entrance level" requirements regarding the proportion of

their sites complying with eleven sustainability procedures before they are allowed to use the charter's logo on their products.

By June 2007, 48 firms had signed up to the charter, more than half of them SMEs. The total includes 16 "associate members", mainly retailers who have pledged to use signatory firms to manufacture their own-brand goods. European discount retailer LIDL is the latest to join. The initiative has also expanded to the east with the inclusion of manufacturing sites in Romania and Bulgaria last year.

Mr Walker says he feels awareness amongst AISE members of the requirements of the REACH Regulation is comparatively high. The association is considering whether there is a demand for it to create a helpdesk service.

Further information

- [AISE press release](#)
- [AISE sustainability report](#)

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