

ENVIRONMENT

# Detergent makers clean up their act

By Fiona Harvey in London

Detergent manufacturers in Europe have taken steps to make their industry more environmentally sound by complying to standards such as regulation of the chemicals they use.

Several large companies, including Reckitt Benckiser and McBride, have signed up to a set of standards that also govern the levels of carbon dioxide emitted in manufacturing their soaps and cleaners, and the amount of water and energy they use and waste they create.

The standards have been developed by the AISE [Association Internationale de la Savonnerie], the international association for soap and detergent makers representing more than 900 companies, which says they go beyond what is required by law in the European Union.

Detergent makers have been attacked by environmental groups for using chemicals such as phosphates that harm rivers and lakes by causing algae to multiply too fast, eventually killing off aquatic life. Regulations were brought in years ago in most countries to prevent this, but the industry is still viewed with suspicion by some "greens".

Shoppers will be able to identify products made by companies adhering to the standards through a small logo that will appear on the packaging. The AISE estimates that about 30m such products will be sold every day by the end of this year.

Companies signing up to the standards must submit to independent scrutiny to judge them on 10 key performance indicators. Though the detergent industry is not covered by the EU's greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme, the companies will agree to monitor their greenhouse gas emissions.