

EPA to Take Action on Chemicals Used in Dyes, Flame Retardants, and Industrial Detergents Efforts to limit exposure and reduce harm to people

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WASHINGTON – As part of Administrator Lisa P. Jackson’s commitment to strengthen and reform chemical management, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released action plans today to address the potential health risks of benzidine dyes, hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) and nonylphenol (NP)/nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs). The chemicals are widely used in both consumer and industrial applications, including dyes, flame retardants, and industrial laundry detergents. The plans identify a range of actions the agency is considering under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

“The action plans announced today are examples of EPA’s renewed dedication to improve chemical safety to protect the health of the American people and the environment.” said Steve Owens, assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. “These action plans lay out concrete steps EPA intends to take to address the risks associated with chemicals commonly used in this country.”

Benzidine dyes are used in the production of consumer textiles, paints, printing inks, paper, and pharmaceuticals and may pose health problems, including cancer. HBCD is used as a flame retardant in expanded polystyrene foam in the building and construction industry, as well as in some consumer products. HBCD has been shown to be persistent and bioaccumulative in the environment and may pose potential reproductive, developmental, and neurological effects in people. NP/NPEs are used in many industrial applications and consumer products such as detergents, cleaners, agricultural and indoor pesticides, as well as food packaging. These chemicals have been detected in people.

The range of actions on these chemicals include adding HBCD and NP/NPE to EPA’s new Chemicals of Concern list, issuing significant new use rules for all three chemicals, and, for HBCD and benzidine dyes, imposing new reporting requirements on EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory and potentially banning or limiting the manufacture or use of the chemicals.

In addition to EPA’s efforts, the Textile Rental Services Association, which represents 98 percent of the industrial laundry facilities in the U.S., has committed to voluntarily phase out the use of NPEs in industrial liquid detergents by Dec. 31, 2013 and industrial powder detergents by the end of 2014.

“While EPA intends to address the potential risks associated with these chemicals,” Owens stated, “we are pleased that the industrial laundry industry has decided to not wait for regulatory action to be completed by the agency and is voluntarily taking steps now to phase out the use of NPEs.”

EPA first announced that it planned to develop the Chemicals of Concern list last December, which indicates that the chemicals may present an unreasonable risk of injury to health and the environment. This previously unused TSCA authority signals the agency’s commitment to fully use the tools currently available, while supporting legislative reform of TSCA.

Additional information: <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals>