



Women in Europe for a Common Future | WECF



## Textiles : Stop the chemical overdose !

*Towards more coherent and transparent rules for textiles in EU and beyond for better protection of workers, consumers and the environment*

Annemasse, October 30th octobre 2013, Press release

We are wearing them daily, and even in direct contact with our skin. But strangely enough, we ignore a lot about them, and they can even hide some dirty little secrets (1): these are textile items. In Europe, their consumption keeps increasing, and children's wear market represents some 28 billion Euros. But yet today's textile model needs to be entirely renewed from the basis. Adding to inhuman working conditions, which the tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza (Bangladesh) unveiled some 6 months ago, comes the global contamination of the textile supply chain through the use of hazardous chemicals. On the 1900 chemicals used by the textile industry, 165 only have been classified according to their hazardous properties (2). But what about the others? Whereas the use of hazardous chemicals in textiles is of concern for many European citizens (3), WECF releases an exhaustive report and [its executive summary](#) with most recent update on chemical contents in babies' and children's textiles, which expose the most vulnerable members of our societies.

### When textiles are not kind to our skin...

Dyes are textile ingredients of concern, since many are suspected or confirmed to trigger contact allergies, a category of chronic diseases with a huge socio-economic impact. On 3000 people using a mix of 8 disperse dyes, the frequency of contact allergies appears to be 1,5% (4). Despite the EU ban of a certain number of azo dyes which release carcinogenic amines, a 2013 report commissioned by DG Enterprise (European Commission) (5) worries about the lack of data on the concentrations of chemical mixtures which end up in the final textile articles, and estimates that existing limits for sensitizing substances – which trigger allergic reactions- are “arbitrary”.

### Phthalates, sleeping bags and pyjamas: when common sense gets lost

You have heard about phthalates, these plastifiers, some of which are restricted or banned in toys or articles which can be placed in the mouth by children. They can make up to 40% of the plastisol printing used in some textiles. Any parent with common sense would expect a pyjama to be as safe as a toy or a sleeping bag. But yet, guidance documents on EU legislations (6) explain that a pyjama is designed to dress a child during sleeping and not to facilitate the sleep... therefore since not intended to be placed in the mouth, sucked or chewed, it is not covered by the above restriction, contrary to a sleeping bag! Who could have guessed so?

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### **Formaldehyde use in textiles, subject to more stringent regulations in China than in France**

One would expect Chinese chemicals regulations to be far beyond chemical regulations in place in the EU. But formaldehyde may prove a wrong example. A well-known sensory and skin irritant, as well as carcinogenic compound, formaldehyde is subject to restrictions both in France and China: both countries have set a maximum limit of 20 ppm in babies and infants textiles. But regarding textiles intended to enter in direct contact with the skin, China has set a maximum threshold of 75 ppm, whereas France allows 100 ppm. At EU level however, France supports the classification of formaldehyde – considered a known human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) - as carcinogenic for humans (1A), which is a way to better regulate this compound within the EU.

### **Flame retardants : a hot issue**

Flame retardants are among the most controversial issues of textile regulations, since flame resistance requirements may be contrary to the aim of reducing the use of said compounds. Some brominated flame retardants are banned from use in textiles, but other flame retardants are not, and their substitutes, like TCEP, TCPP or TDCP which are about to be phased out from toys, are not banned from use in textiles (7).

### **Labels, tools to help consumers making informed choices**

Some companies are setting so-called “restricted substances lists” i.e. the list of chemicals which they ban or limit in their products, but to date, there are no positive lists of substances used by textile companies, which many actors deeply regret, as shown by numerous reports (8). Moreover, it has been noted by various stakeholders that even public bodies in charge of assessing the safety of products are not in capacity to obtain the required information to allow them to proceed to the assessment! Labels, which set a variety of criteria, are therefore the last possibility offered to consumers to try to find their way in the jungle of labels and textile products. With the help of several experts, WECF made a selection of some of those which seem to provide the best guarantees for consumers (available in our Executive Summary).

- (1) [Testing by CHEJ on children's raincoats](#) showing the presence of more than 6000 ppm of DEHP in one article, released on October 30th 2013.
- (2) [Report by KEMI, the Swedish chemicals Agency](#), April 2013
- (3) [Eurobarometer 361, February 2013](#), 85% of the people surveyed think there are chemicals in textiles, but only 38% admit they look for ingredient information while purchasing.
- (4) KEMI, op. cit., 2013
- (5) [Study on the links between allergic reactions and textile products](#), RSP for DG Enterprise, January 2013, page 10
- (6) [EU Guidance document on the concept « which can be placed in the mouth »](#) and [REACH guideline on toys](#)
- (7) *Chemical Watch*, article de mai 2013, *EU plans migration limits on BPA in toys*
- (8) UNEP, Finnish Environment Institute, Swedish Chemical Agency, etc.

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