

EU Ecolabel on Textiles and Bed Mattresses:

PAN Germany Comments on the criteria proposal of May 2013

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A healthy world for all. Protect humanity and the environment from pesticides. Promote alternatives.

Background

The revision of the EU Ecolabel criteria for textiles was initiated end of 2011. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission has requested comments by stakeholders on the criteria for textiles and bed mattresses proposed in May 2013 by 5th of July.^{1,2}

PAN Germany comments

1. Organic cotton as mandatory criterion for EU Ecolabel

The criterion addressing the origin of cotton should guarantee an ecological sound sustainable production of cotton and the absence of pesticide residues in cotton fibres and textiles. This is not the case in the Commission proposal from May 2013.

PAN Germany calls for the use of 100% organic cotton in “Eco” labelled textiles. We question the added value of cotton production according to the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for the EU Ecolabel, as this requirement will be made mandatory within the EU by 2014 through the Framework Directive 2009/128/EC for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides anyway. From our point of view, Ecolabel criteria have to go beyond mandatory standards of plant protection. Moreover, IPM standards cannot ensure the absence of highly hazardous pesticides³ or genetically modified cotton production. Therefore we support the position of EEB / BEUC in this regard.

2.1 Exclusion of biocide treatment in all textile production processes

PAN Germany welcomes that the previous criteria as well as the new Commission draft recommends the restriction of the use of biocides in EU ecolabelled textiles. According to Annex I (5. Restrictions applying to finishing processes) “Biocides shall not be incorporated into the final product in order to impart biocidal properties”. However, this specification does not regulate previous production stages, e.g. the use of biocides in order to treat fibres.

We therefore call for clarification and recommend an additional specification under 1.6 of the Commission proposal “Restrictions applying to all production stages” which clarify that ***biocide treatment to protect the fibre or the textile itself or to create a biocidal function (e.g. antibacterial or odour-inhibition) is prohibited for EU ecolabelled textiles at all stages of the production process.***

2.2 Bed mattresses – Exclusion of biocide treatment for primary biocidal function

According to Art.1(c) bed mattresses for medical devices are excluded from the scope of the Commission draft criteria. The EU Ecolabel criteria focuses on bed mattresses as article of daily use which do not need any specific health properties. PAN Germany recommends following statement under criterion No 8. “Biocides” of the Commissions proposal: ***“Bed mattresses shall not be treated with biocides in order to impart a primary biocidal***

¹ <http://susproc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/textiles/stakeholders.html>

² <http://susproc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mattresses/>

³ PAN International (2013): List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides:
http://www.pan-germany.org/download/PAN_HHP-List_1306.pdf

function, e.g. antibacterial or odour-inhibition function". For material preservation, the biocidal active substances must be approved for such purposes according to Biocides Regulation (EC) No 528/2012 AND criterion 10 on hazardous substances shall be respected."

2.3 Bed mattresses - Extend criterion 10 on hazardous substances

The list of criteria defined "hazardous substances" do not ensure that biocides containing nanomaterials or biocides which cause bacterial resistance or antibiotic cross-resistance are excluded from the use in EU ecolabelled bed mattresses. ***PAN Germany recommends to take these important hazard criteria "nanoscale compounds" and "substance that cause bacterial resistance" into consideration.***

2.4 Explanatory statement

Biocides are potentially hazardous substances that are designed to combat unwanted organisms, such as bacteria, algae or insects and many of them also have undesired side effects that further harm human health and the environment. Consequently, they are subject to an authorisation process according to the European biocidal product legislation. Due to considerable delays in implementing existing regulations in the past, active substances (disinfectants, preservatives) that play an important role in treating articles such as textiles, have not been subject to an authorisation process and have not been assessed regarding to their effectiveness and their risks. A biocidal treatment of consumer products such as textiles or bed mattresses is not essential and can lead to health and environmental problems.

Studies of the Swedish Chemical Agency (KEMI), for example, show that the biocides silver, triclosan, and trichloro-carban were quickly washed out of textiles. They determined a loss of more than 50% and up to 100% after ten washing cycles. The researchers of a study funded by the German Federal Environment Agency (UBA) have recognized that there is evidence of unacceptable risks for soils and sediments because of the release of silver compounds into the environment. Among others, these research results and a summary of the new regulations on biocide-treated articles, enacted by 1 September 2013 in accordance to the new Regulation 528/2012/EC, are summarised in a PAN Germany brochure.⁴

An especially significant problem is the widespread use of biocides such as silver (colloidal, salts- or nano-compounds) or triclosan as they can promote the development of bacterial resistances. The website on effects of biocides on antibiotic resistance established by DG Health and Consumer Protection based on the SCENIHR opinion⁵ points out that "the possibility that the use of biocides could lead to the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria has already been indicated by several laboratory studies" and that "biocides could pose a direct threat to human health if they lead to the survival of some harmful bacteria which are

⁴ In: PAN Germany (2013): Biocide-treated Consumer products: Markets – Policies – Risks: http://www.pan-germany.org/download/biocides/biocide-treated_consumer_products.pdf, references 23 & 26

⁵ Link to website „Effects of Biocides on antibiotic resistance“: <http://ec.europa.eu/health/opinions/en/biocides-antibiotic-resistance/index.htm>

resistant to antimicrobial products”. A current scientific review concluded that “the potential for bacterial resistance to silver (in any of its forms) seems to be of the greatest concern”.⁶

Keeping this in mind PAN Germany is very concerned that seals such as the OEKO-Tex Standard 100 accept antibacterial treatment of textiles and bed mattresses with e.g. silver biocides. Product descriptions declare silver treatment as “natural” and “environmentally-friendly”. We recommend the reassessment of “Eco” quality seals and certificates to support biocide-free products which are in line with the objectives of sustainable and environmentally-sound consumption (see footer 4). An EU Ecolabel should not support such biocidal treatment neither for fibres nor for final products.

According to the Biocides Regulation, a treated article that has a primary biocidal function shall be considered a biocidal product (Art. 3(1)(a)). The EU Commission has suggested an interpretation for these cases, e.g. when the biocidal function, in comparison to other properties or function of the article, is especially designed or emphasized, or when a health-related claim is made (e.g. “antibacterial”, “controls fungus growth” or “kills 99% of bacteria”).⁷

Concerning nanoscale compounds: because of the unique behaviour, toxic properties, and possible risks of biocidal products that contain nanomaterials (for example, nanoscale silver compounds), special risk assessment methods are prescribed for these active ingredients and products in the new Biocides Regulation. However such test guidelines have not become effective up to now. As long as the health risks cannot be assessed reliably, the German Federal Institute of Risk Assessment (BfR) advises against using nanosilver⁸.

⁶ Reidy B., et al. (2013): Mechanisms of Silver Nanoparticle Release, Transformation and Toxicity: A Critical Review of Current Knowledge and Recommendations for Future Studies and Applications. *Materials* 2013, 6, 2295-2350; doi:10.3390/ma6062295; open access: www.mdpi.com/journal/materials

⁷ European Commission, DG Env (2012): Frequently asked questions on treated article. CA-Dec12-Doc.5.1.g

⁸ BfR (2010): Nanosilber gehört nicht in Lebensmittel, Textilien und Kosmetika: http://www.bfr.bund.de/de/presseinformation/2010/08/nanosilber_gehoert_nicht_in_lebensmittel_textilien_und_kosmetika-50963.html