

Citizens' summary

EU proposal for limiting phosphates in detergents

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- The quality of water in many of the rivers and lakes in the EU is unsatisfactory. One reason is that they contain too much phosphate which causes algae grow at the expense of other species, a phenomenon known as "eutrophication".
- Phosphates in laundry detergents are potentially the third largest contributor to phosphates in surface waters, after agriculture and sewage.
- Phosphates can be removed from waste water at specialised treatment plants, but this is costly, and not everywhere available. The less phosphate there is in waste water, the lower the operating costs, and the less that enters the environment.
- The discharge of phosphates to waste water should therefore be limited where technically and economically feasible.
- Phosphates are used in detergents to ensure efficient cleaning in hard water. However there are now benign and cost-effective alternatives to phosphates for use in laundry detergent.

WHAT IS THE PROPOSAL?

- The proposal will restrict the phosphate content of laundry detergents in the EU by setting an upper limit of 0.5% by weight related to the total phosphorous (P) content.
- It will thereby reduce the discharge of detergent phosphate into waste water and, where specialised treatment is not available, reduce discharges into the environment.

WHO WOULD BENEFIT AND HOW?

- Waste water treatment plants will benefit from reduced costs for removing phosphates from waste water.
- EU water quality will improve. The flow of phosphate across national boundaries in rivers will be more manageable. The measure will also support regional cooperations involving non-EU countries to manage eutrophication.

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN BY THE EU?

- An EU limit will ensure that all EU Member States make an equal contribution to reducing the risk of eutrophication arising from the use of phosphates in detergents, thereby allowing existing national and regional initiatives to progress more rapidly.

WHEN IS THE PROPOSAL LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?

- **1 January 2013**, subject to adoption by the European Parliament and by the Council.

Data for search engines	
Title tag (<i>± 70 characters with spaces</i>)	EU proposal limiting phosphates in detergents. – Citizen's summary
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