

Your Voice In Europe: ROADMAP feedback for Analysis of the interface between chemicals, products and waste legislation and identification of policy options

User's data:

- Domain : Company/Business organisation
- Name : Zdenek Hruska
- Email : zdenek.hruska@plasticseurope.org
- Country : Belgium
- Organisation : VinylPlus
- Headquarter : Belgium
- Register : 44203689086-96
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Feedback:

**VinylPlus (<http://www.vinylplus.eu/>), the voluntary sustainable development programme of the European PVC industry, has proven to be a frontrunner on the circular economy by ensuring continuous progress towards clearly defined sustainability goals. In its quest for the highest resource efficiency VinylPlus defined numerous objectives, from sustainable use of energy and additives up to the challenging recycling targets.*

VinylPlus supports the Commission's action plan for Circular Economy related to the importance of a well-functioning chemicals legislation which emphasizes the need for adequate information on the presence of substances of very high concern in materials, products and waste. VinylPlus seeks to ensure that traceability and certification schemes are introduced as criteria for ensuring the quality of recycled materials and processes. This would stimulate demand for secondary raw materials while preserving a high level of environment and health protection and would help to avoid unnecessary disposal and the loss of these materials from a circular economy.

The Roadmap has outlined four barriers that create obstacles for a smooth transition of recycled materials from waste to new products, namely:

*#1: Insufficient information about substances of concern in products and waste
PVC is mainly used in medium and long life applications, essentially in construction products. PVC waste from such applications may therefore contain 'legacy additives' which were allowed and considered safe when the products were made, but are now classified as hazardous and may be subject to restrictions or authorisation under REACH or to specific labelling under waste legislation. Those additives, mainly heavy metal-based stabilisers and some low molecular weight plasticisers may be considered as substances of concern in the spirit of his roadmap.*

More than 15-year successful experience of VinylPlus/Vinyl 2010 voluntary commitments with various recycling schemes makes it possible today to ensure traceability of PVC waste throughout the recycling chain. The Recovinyl (www.recovinyl.com) scheme certifies the traceability and provides the converters with documented proof of the original application and composition (post-consumer or post-industrial waste). This allows evaluating the presence of restricted substances, unless disproven by appropriate analyses. In addition, many recyclers are Eucertplast (www.eucertplast.eu) certified as well. The BS EN 15343 is the European standard that specifies the procedures needed for the traceability of recycled plastics.

#2: Presence of substances of concern in recycled materials and in articles made thereof
VinylPlus supported several studies which have demonstrated that the products containing legacy additives would not cause risk to the consumer because of their extremely low bio-availability. As there is a broad consensus that landfilling of recyclable waste is not sustainable, the only realistic alternative treatment would be incineration. Although incineration with energy recovery is a valid option when recycling is not feasible for technical or economic reasons, life cycle analyses show that in most cases the balance of environmental impacts is clearly in favour of recycling.

#3: Uncertainties about how materials can cease to be waste

There are no harmonized conditions across EU to define when the recovered plastics cease to be waste. In addition, there are different interpretations by member states regarding the manner in which waste can cease to be waste and to which legislation it shall be subjected (waste or chemical). This complicates unnecessarily the recycling business and increases the burden of waste management for both recyclers and converters, being a strong deterrent for companies, especially SMEs, to invest in recycling activities. Further, the classification of waste as hazardous may be interpreted in some Member States as a prohibition to reach 'end of waste' status. EU harmonised conditions, if proposed, should refrain from any condition related to the hazard classification of waste.

#4: Difficulties in applying EU waste classification methodologies and impacts on the recyclability of materials

Today, the recycling of plastics with legacy additives is too complex and burdensome. A recycler wanting to sell recycle as a product containing substance(s) subject to authorisation must submit an authorisation request. Obtaining authorisation under REACH is a difficult and time consuming procedure, and entails high costs which are usually beyond the capability of smaller recyclers and constitute a strong disincentive even for the larger ones. Moreover, this authorisation is only granted for a limited period of time and the possible presence of several other substances subject to authorisation may require multiple separate applications, again with lengthy processes and uncertain results.

Summary

The EU wide criteria for waste management are necessary. The upcoming legislation must clarify the interface between waste, chemical and product policies and resolve the obvious conflict between the circularity and resource efficiency concept on one side and the current waste legislation on the other side. Europe wide measures to promote the creation of an efficient market for recycled plastics are clearly needed. The support from authorities for further development of industry-led quality standards for secondary plastic raw materials and a quality assurance scheme for plastic recyclers is crucial.

VinylPlus is convinced that mechanical recycling of PVC wastes with legacy additives is beneficial from a resource efficiency point of view, and can be done safely as far as human

health and the environment are concerned.

VinylPlus trusts that the Circular Economy Package will provide a well-defined, pragmatic and stable legislative framework which will allow recycling to fully exploit its potential in sustainable society.

Feedback file: