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Brominated Flame Retardants and POPs

UN Stockholm Convention Committee concludes that only lower brominated diphenylethers are POPs and postpones discussions on the potential nomination of BFR HBCD

The 4th meeting of the POPs Review Committee of the Stockholm Convention on POPs (POPRC4) concluded that certain lower brominated components of the legacy commercial brominated flame retardant Octa-BDE should be listed as POPs. The meeting also recognised the lack of timely information supporting the nomination of the brominated flame retardant HBCD and discussion on this potential nomination was postponed to POPRC5.

The decisions of the POPRC4 will be considered at the 4th meeting of the highest decision-making body of the Convention, the Convention of the Parties, in May 2009 (COP4). COP4 will have to give final approval on proposed wording of the listings of c-OctaBDE and c-Penta-BDE. Regarding HBCD, since the nomination was not timely, its consideration by the COP will be delayed until COP5 in 2011 or COP6 in 2013.

The Stockholm Convention is an international agreement of the United Nations Environmental Programme. Its remit is the identification, evaluation and elimination of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) from the environment. Brominated flame retardants are not POPs. Only three brominated flame retardants are currently in the process of consideration as POPs substances at different stages: commercial PentaBDE, commercial OctaBDE and Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD, HBCDD).

Commercial PentaBDE (c-PentaBDE)

Last year at POPRC3 it was agreed that certain components in the c-pentaBDE product (those Br4 - tetraBDE and Br5 – penta-BDE isomers) should be recommended to the 2009 Conference of the Parties (COP) to be listed as POPs. The BSEF member companies that made c-PentaBDE stopped producing it in 2004 or earlier.

Commercial OctaBDE (c-OctaBDE)

The POPRC4 concluded that only the lower brominated diphenylethers (Br 6 -hexaBDEs and Br7 - heptaBDEs) present in the legacy commercial brominated flame retardant Octa-BDE, should be listed as POPs. No other constituents of these commercial mixtures were recommended to be POPs or found to be precursors to the formation of POPs. Octa-BDE was a flame retardant mainly used in electronic and electrical equipment. BSEF member companies stopped producing it in 2004. Several countries have already restricted certain BDE's found in the c-OctaBDE.

Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD, HBCDD)

The POPRC 4 committee of experts did not receive information regarding the nomination of HBCD in time. Consideration of Norway's nomination of HBCD was therefore postponed until next year (POPRC 5). HBCD should not be confused with long dead brominated compound which has also been going through the process of review under the Stockholm Convention Hexabromobiphenyl (HBB) used briefly over three decades ago.

-Ends

BSEF is the international organisation of the bromine chemical industry, whose remit is to inform stakeholders and commission science on brominated chemicals such as flame retardants.