

ChemicalWatch

GLOBAL RISK & REGULATION NEWS

EU retailers under pressure to pull toxic hygiene products

Petition attracts over 20,000 signatures

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Supermarket chains in the EU are facing pressure to stop selling personal hygiene products such as tampons and baby diapers that contain toxic chemicals.



A social media campaign - #MyClosestEnemy - is accusing them of stocking some popular tampons and diapers that have been bleached with chlorine dioxide.

According to campaign founder Rune Leithe, the bleaching process can release **dioxins** - a group of compounds linked to health disorders including cancer, infertility and immune system damages. They are also persistent organic pollutants.

"It is estimated that the average woman will use 11,000 tampons or menstrual pads in her lifetime - risking repeated levels of exposure to chemicals like dioxins," he said.

The campaign also launched a petition, which has attracted 20,000 signatures so far, to support an open letter to the EU's largest retail chains urging them to stop selling these unsafe products and asking producers to offer chlorine-free alternatives.

The campaign also intends to raise consumer awareness of the issue. According to Mr Leithe, there is currently no legal requirement for dioxins and other chemical ingredients to be listed on the packaging of these products.

As a result, consumers "cannot avoid" potential toxins when purchasing such items, he added.

French example

Mr Leithe urged EU governments to act on the issue and follow the example set by French authorities. In January they asked diaper manufacturers to **review** their production processes and impose stronger controls on raw materials.

This followed a **report** published by the French Agency for Food, Environment and Occupational Health and Safety (Anses), which showed alarming levels of dioxins in these products, fuelling concern that they represent a public health risk.

'No risk'

Pierre Wiertz, general manager of Edana - the trade association representing most manufacturers of baby diapers in the EMEA region - said its members' products do not pose a risk to the health of consumers and comply with relevant EU legislation.

When authorities find traces of chemicals of concern in these products, he added, they are at levels "many times lower" than legal limits.

Earlier this year, Edana said that studies carried out in 2017 and 2018 by the Belgian, French, South Korean, Swedish and Swiss authorities found that feminine hygiene products and baby diapers are safe.

At the EU level, the recently adopted single-use plastics **Directive** calls on manufacturers to avoid using hazardous chemical substances in sanitary towels, tampons and tampon applicators.

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