

19 November 2009

NGO Conference in Brussels Debates Policy on Brominated Flame Retardants

On 18 November, RoHS Rapporteur Jill Evans hosted an event entitled “Greening consumer electronics – from hazardous materials to sustainable solutions”. The event was organised by the environmental NGO Chemsec and focused on Ms Evans position on the RoHS recast and on a few examples of using halogen free flame retardants in electronics given by Apple, Sony-Ericsson and DSM.

Overall, the event was mainly attended by industry, NGOs and consultants with little attendance by MEPs. Ms Evans outlined some of the main aspects of her report, including her proposal to phase-out all halogenated flame retardants and PVC.

Professor Bergman, from Stockholm University, focused much of his presentation on PBDEs such as Octa and Penta, which are already restricted across the EU, and have been for several years. Regarding other brominated flame retardants, Prof Bergman raised concerns in terms of bioaccumulation and persistence, but at the same time stated that those brominated flame retardants used as reactive components should be looked at more carefully before considering any restriction.

Representatives from Apple and Sony Ericsson gave examples of their programmes in place to move away from using brominated flame retardants and PVC. At no point was there any mention of specific alternative flame retardant chemicals being used. Moreover, the presentations made no reference to EU risk assessments on leading brominated flame retardants nor to the EU framework legislation on chemicals, REACH.

Willem Hofland, Chairman of EBFRIP highlighted the need to avoid contradictions between RoHS and REACH and called on EU policy makers to respect decisions already taken under existing EU regulations, and not to pre-empt the emerging REACH process for assessing chemicals. ([click here](#))

Another industry representative stressed that generic bans on substances do not provide environmental benefits and that substances need to be looked at individually.

Fern Abrams of the global electronics industry organisation IPC pointed out that it would be a mistake to assume that companies like Apple and Sony-Ericsson reflect the position of the whole electrical and electronics industry. She also encouraged decision-makers not to undermine REACH by taking a position that put RoHS in conflict with REACH.

According to the currently forecasted schedule, the European Parliament’s Environment Committee is scheduled to have a first opportunity to review Ms Evans’ report on 1 December. Amendments would then be due by 14 January with a vote in Committee taking place in April.

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