



PRESS RELEASE
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Electronics Industry Moving Away From Brominated Flame Retardants and PVC – An opportunity for EU to Introduce Restrictions

(Gothenburg – 11 May 2010) A Market Overview presented today by the public interest organisation ChemSecⁱ demonstrates that it is possible to replace brominated flame retardants and PVC in a large number of electronic products. The electronics industry has already started to replace these problematic substances and in a couple of weeks EU legislators have a unique opportunity to confirm this transition and restrict brominated flame retardants and PVC from being used in electronics.

Many of the electronic products we all use every day contain hazardous chemicals. Traditionally brominated flame retardants have often been used in electronic products to slow down the spread of fire, and PVC-plastic has been used in cables and casings. However, the use of brominated flame retardants and PVC in electronics is highly problematic from both an environmental and a human health perspective.ⁱⁱ Less hazardous alternatives are available on the market, meeting the same technical and safety requirements.

EU legislators are now in the process of deciding on future restrictions on hazardous chemicals in electronics. In the review of the RoHS directiveⁱⁱⁱ, a proposal put forward by the European Parliament rapporteur suggests restrictions on brominated flame retardants and PVC-plastic for a number of electronic products.

The ChemSec report *Electronics without brominated flame retardants and PVC - a Market Overview* shows that it is technically and economically feasible to replace these substances. The report lists more than 500 product models on the market today, for example mobile phones, computers, washing machines, coffee machines and TVs, free or almost free^{iv} from PVC and brominated flame retardants. Products from 28 companies, among them Acer, Apple, HP, Nokia, Philips, Samsung and Sony Ericsson are listed in the report.

– “Since many electronic companies have already removed brominated flame retardants and PVC, EU legislators now have a unique opportunity to restrict the use of these problematic substances in all electronic products and thus show the way for the rest of the electronics industry,” says ChemSec Project Coordinator Frida Hök.

The European Parliament Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee will vote regarding the recast of the RoHS Directive in the beginning of June, and the vote in the European Parliament plenary is planned for July.

–“An EU restriction on the use of brominated flame retardants in electronics would not only reduce the amount of hazardous substances in our environment, but also has the potential to contribute to new jobs in the EU, as many of the alternatives to brominated flame retardants are produced in Europe,” says ChemSec Director Anne-Sofie Andersson.

–“Brominated flame retardants, similar to PCBs and DDT, are persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the most insidious type of toxic substance, which the global community via the Stockholm Convention, agreed in 2009 to sunset their use due to their toxic threat on human and environmental health. The Market Overview, illustrates how EU regulation could help advance a greener economy and thus aid in reducing the raising toxic tide arriving in developing countries in the disguised form such as gifts, reconditioned items, recycling materials etc, but in reality they are e-waste laden with BFRs,” comments Jamidu Katima, IPEN CoChair, Tanzania.^v

– “This critical report demonstrates that it is technically feasible to produce a wide range of electronic products globally that do not contain brominated flame retardants and PVC, substances that to pose unacceptably high adverse human health and environmental risks throughout the life cycle of electronic products. US organizations again are looking to the European Union for leadership on this issue by restricting these substances and leveling the global playing field,” comments Ted Smith, chair of the US-based Electronic TakeBack Coalition.^{vi}

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Electronics without brominated flame retardants and PVC - a Market Overview, as well as additional press material, is available online at **www.chemsec.org/rohs/market-overview**

Notes:

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- i. ChemSec, the International Chemical Secretariat, is a public interest organisation working to highlight the urgent need to phase out hazardous substances and bridge the gap between science, business and policy-makers. www.chemsec.org.
 - ii. Brominated flame retardants and PVC have the potential to transform into some of the most toxic chemicals ever made by humans, dioxins and furans, which can for example cause cancer and birth defects. Brominated flame retardants can be toxic, and many of them stay in the environment for a long time and accumulate in animals and humans.
 - iii. The EU RoHS directive, Restricting the use of Hazardous Substances in electronic and electrical equipment, is currently under review. Since 2006 RoHS restricts the use of two groups of brominated flame retardants and four heavy metals, among them lead and mercury.
 - iv. Almost free: products with some remaining brominated flame retardants or PVC-containing components/parts.
 - v. IPEN - The International POPs Elimination Network, is a global network of over 700 public interest NGOs from more than 100 countries, working to eliminate Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). www.ipen.org
 - vi. The Electronics TakeBack Coalition (ETBC) promotes green design and responsible recycling in the electronics industry. Their goal is to protect the health and well being of electronics users, workers, and the communities where electronics are produced and discarded. www.electronicstakeback.com