

Investigation results on alkylphenol ethoxylates

Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEOs) are a class of chemicals used as surfactants, and most of APEOs used in the textile and leather industry are nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEOs).

NPEOs are non-ionic surfactants and are used in a wide variety of applications including detergents, cleaners, degreasers, dry cleaning aids, petroleum dispersants, emulsifiers, wetting agents, adhesives, agrochemicals, including indoor pesticides, cosmetics, paper and textile processing formulations, prewash spotters, metalworking fluids, oilfield chemicals, paints and coatings, and dust control agents.

There is concern that continued use of NPEOs could have a negative impact on the environment and potentially to human health through wastewater discharge. NPEOs are classified as endocrine disrupting substances in the Substitute It Now list of REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals) regulation in the EU and many apparel companies, including Fast Retailing, include NPEOs in their restricted substances lists. While NPEOs are restricted in the EU, they are not regulated in other parts of the world.

Fast Retailing established its own Chemical Management Standards in 2007 in an effort to uphold the highest standards in environmental management and corporate social responsibility. We require our partners to eliminate the use of hazardous substances in manufacturing our products. We have also announced our commitment to zero discharge of all hazardous chemicals by January 1st in 2020, and strengthened initiatives for the phase-out of specified substances. We have revised our Chemical Management Standards in 2012 and strengthened the contract language on APEOs, which was originally in the standards. Furthermore, we are raising awareness on this issue with our partners through seminars and factory visits.

In addition, we have started to investigate the use of specified substances of high concern throughout the supply chain, including processing factories. As one of the substances with high priority we have investigated the use of APEOs throughout the supply chain. While APEOs are not globally restricted, they are suspected as having endocrine-disrupting properties.

The investigation was conducted through questionnaires and interviews with chemical manufacturers that supply washing and printing facilities with formulations and preparations that may contain APEOs. As a result, we found 13% of investigated factories had formulations and preparations containing APEOs stored on-site.

From the results of this investigation, we are working with our partners to eliminate APEOs from the manufacturing process by ensuring formulations and preparations do not contain APEOs. In the event that those substances are found in formulations and preparations, we identify substitute chemicals that are not harmful to the environment and conduct testing to ensure the alternatives can deliver the same or comparable processing effects. We will continue our investigations and efforts to eliminate chemicals containing APEOs from all the factories in our supply chain.