

Chewing gum chemical not toxic: Government

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OTTAWA — The federal government has backed down on plans to declare two chemicals found in some chewing gum and cosmetics as toxic.

But the ministries of health and the environment on Friday also moved ahead with plans to declare three chemicals used in everyday products as toxic to the environment.

These include two types of siloxanes known as D4 and D5, commonly found in shampoos, skin care products, deodorants and household cleaning products. Siloxanes are also found in silicone breast implants.

But based on new information, they've reversed course on plans made public in May to declare vinyl acetate, used to make the polymer that's used as a base in chewing gum, as toxic to human health. Applying a "precautionary" approach, the ministries had earlier proposed this "on the basis of the carcinogenicity of vinyl acetate, for which there may be a probability of harm at any level of exposure."

The ministries also switched their position on a third siloxane, known as D6, found in over 500 cosmetic products. They announced their intention last spring to slap a toxic label on it and propose its virtual elimination from the environment.

A toxic designation kick-starts a process that could lead to a ban in certain products, as was done with bisphenol A in baby bottles.

Aaron Freeman, policy director of Environmental Defence, lauded the government declaring two siloxanes, found in thousands of personal-care products, as toxic to the environment.

"This is the first step toward regulating these harmful chemicals," he said, pointing out D4 has also been linked to harmful developmental fertility problems, liver damage and cancer and D5 is a potential carcinogen.

"We urge the government to go the distance by getting these chemicals off the market," said Freeman.

The government released its decision under its Chemicals Management Plan, which places the onus on industry to demonstrate that chemicals of concern are safe for people and the environment.

Following a "toxic" designation, the government is required to draft a plan to manage the chemical.

The silicone industry on Friday urged Ottawa not to take any further action on D4 and D5, citing soon to be completed scientific studies.

"We fully expect that these studies will continue to demonstrate that D4 and D5 are safe for the environment and that action is not needed," Karluss Thomas, executive director of the Silicones Environmental, Health and Safety Council of North America, said in a statement.

He added that any "significant restriction" on their use "would provide no measurable environmental benefit while creating unnecessary inconvenience and expense" for consumers and the industry.

The council touts numerous "consumer-desired qualities and benefits that cannot easily be replicated by alternative materials," such as making lotions and shampoos feel more luxuriant, apply more smoothly and produce better shine.

Mike Patton, a spokesman for the Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, said the industry is a "strong proponent" of the management plan, and "will continue to work closely with the Canadian government to ensure that our products are safe not only for human health but also the Canadian environment. Should the results of the international field studies show a problem in the environment, our companies will act appropriately."

In addition to siloxanes, the ministries assessed 13 other substances, and determined that five were toxic to human health: pigment yellow 34 and red 103, a colourant used in paints, dyes, inks, and plastics; thiourea, used in electronic products, insecticides and textiles; isoprene, used in rubber and plastic manufacturing; and oxirane, used in paints, coatings and adhesives.

The ministries also determined that 2,4,6-tri-tert-butylphenol or TTBP is an environmental toxin.

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