



Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

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## Global community agrees to phase out toxic flame retardant.

Today in Geneva, at the 6th Conference of Parties of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, (COP6), the global community agreed to phase out Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) - a highly toxic brominated flame retardant widely used in building insulation, upholstery and electronics in the EU, despite severe adverse effects on the development of the nervous system and mental abilities of children. The decision includes an exemption for use in building insulation materials. The decision rejected a proposed exemption that would have allowed products containing that toxic substance to be recycled despite a desperate push by the European Union.

This chemical becomes the 23<sup>rd</sup> substance to be globally banned under the Stockholm Convention. Once released in the environment, HBCD is highly persistent and is now ubiquitous in the environment on a global level. The chemical accumulates in the fatty tissues of living organisms and is recognized to disrupt the hormone system, with potential adverse effects on the development of the nervous system and mental abilities of children.

“This decision is an important step towards a toxic free future” says David Azoulay, senior attorney with the Center for International Environmental Law, “however the role played by the EU delegation during this negotiation is deeply concerning”.

While many countries proposed a global ban of this toxic substance without any exemption, the EU fought to obtain an exemption for its production and use in insulation material, and an authorization to recycle products containing the substance until 2024, in contravention of the text of the Convention and EU implementing legislation, which clearly forbids the recycling of persistent organic pollutants. This is all the more surprising considering that under REACH, the EU's key chemicals law, HBCD is considered a Substance of Very High Concern (SVHC), which should be phased out after 2015.

“It is a shame that the EU is actively working to reduce protection for its own citizens from a chemical that, regardless, is destined to be phased out under REACH”, says Mikael Karlsson,

president of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and European Environmental Bureau.

This exemption will lead to prolonged exposure of humans to this toxic substance, including EU citizens, due to the recognized long-range transport of this chemical.

Addressing concerns from Norway, African countries, and NGOs , the decision imposes further limitation to the exemption for use:

- Insulation materials manufactured during the 5 years phase out period, will have to be identified as containing HBCD (e.g.: by being of a particular color) to ensure that the HBCD containing waste can be easily separated from other waste and sent for proper destruction.
- Furthermore, export to non producing countries of insulation material containing HBCD produced during the 5 years phase out period is forbidden.

Even though the EU only managed to get one limited exemption through, environmental NGOs are extremely concerned about the exemption itself, and in particular by the role, played by the EU in this negotiation.

Alexandra Caterbow, Senior Policy Advisor for Chemicals and Health, from WECF says: “EU had the chance to act on its full global responsibility, but failed”.