



# EU ECOLABEL FOR ABSORBENT HYGIENE PRODUCTS

BEUC and EEB position on proposal to be voted on 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2014

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## Summary

The European Commission has presented a proposal on a Decision establishing EU Ecolabel criteria for absorbent hygiene products (AHPs) to be voted by Member States at Regulatory Committee on 14 of March 2014<sup>1</sup>.

The EEB and BEUC welcome the proposal and are pleased with achievements in a number of key areas, such as:

- 100% of the fluff pulp used is to be covered by valid sustainable forest management and chain of custody certificates issued by independent third party certification schemes.
- 100% of cotton shall be organic.
- Strong horizontal requirements to avoid hazardous substances based on article 6.6 of the Ecolabel Regulation.
- Exclusion of optical brighteners.
- Exclusion of fragrances for diapers, tampons and nursing pads.

Despite satisfaction that all fluff pulp is to be covered by valid sustainable forest management and chain of custody certificates, both organisations strongly disagree with the requirement that only 25% of the fluff pulp shall originate from sustainable certified forests, as this does not reflect the environmental excellence of products already in the market. In the face of concerns over lower availability of certified fluff pulp, evidence has been provided of products that can comply with a requirement of 70%. Both organisations strongly recommend to raise the level of ambition for this criterion and align it at least with the criteria set for labelling by well-established certification schemes in the field of forestry.

The EEB and BEUC are very satisfied that fragrances cannot be used in diapers, tampons and nursing pads, but strongly disagree with the approach allowing its use for female pads. Even though it is recognised that the range of fragrances excluded from female pads has been increased, both organisations call on the European Commission to extend the full exclusion of fragrances to the entire scope of AHPs.

The EEB and BEUC do not support the use of lotions in Ecolabelled diapers, despite improvement of the criterion which restricts a number of chemicals of concern. If lotions are to be allowed, MIT and CMIT should be added to the list of substances excluded.

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<sup>1</sup> The scope of this product group comprises baby diapers, feminine care pads, tampons and nursing pads. It does not include incontinence products.



## Certified pulp

The EEB and BEUC welcome the amendment of the criterion on sourcing as it further clarifies that the remaining share which is not certified from sustainable managed forests (75%) shall meet additional requirements beyond legality. It is implicitly understood that this refers to the exclusion of controversial sources. However, to ensure that, it is needed to adjust the assessment and verification text so controversial sources are mentioned (see proposal below).

The EEB and BEUC strongly disagree with the requirement that only 25% of the fluff pulp shall originate from sustainable certified forests, as this does not reflect environmental excellence of products already in the market (able to meet stricter requirements). Both organisations call on the European Commission and Member States to raise this value or at least consider its revision within two years through a statement accompanying the Decision.

The EEB and BEUC would like to reiterate its recommendation that the all EU Ecolabel products should set an ambition level of environmental excellence for sustainable sourcing aiming at 100% of the fibres originating from sustainable managed forests and AT LEAST not below the criteria set for labelling by well-established certification schemes in the field of forestry.

The EEB and BEUC have provided evidence that there are diapers on the market from different manufacturers which comply with the FSC Mixed Sources standards (70% SFM-certified fibres)<sup>2</sup>. Both organisations, strongly disagree with the requirement that only 25% of the fibres shall be certified from sustainable managed forests (SFM-certified fibres). This level is far beyond what manufacturers can already achieve and is not based on the best environmental performance achieved by products on the Community market.

The background report states that the requirement is more ambitious than the Nordic Swan criteria for Sanitary Products, whose threshold for SFM-certified fibres is 20%. However, this comparison is not appropriate as the Nordic Swan have more selective requirements for the certification schemes it accepts (it even evaluates FSC country by country).

The EEB and BEUC are satisfied that the amendment proposal to make more explicit that other controversial sources beyond legality shall be avoided shall be considered. However, it is further needed to adjust the assessment and verification text to be consistent with this aim. The following text is proposed:

*"The applicant shall obtain from the pulp manufacturer(s) valid independently certified chain of custody certificates demonstrating that wood fibres have been grown according to Sustainable Forestry Management principles and are from legal **and controlled sources**. FSC, PEFC or equivalent schemes shall be accepted as independent certification."*

The EEB and BEUC further suggest to delete the last paragraph referring to FLEGT and CITES as it gives the impression that this is an exception to the rule that all material has to be certified by FSC/PEFC or equivalent. FLEGT and CITES are not equivalent to PEFC and FSC.

<sup>2</sup> Further to the list of products provided in [comments sent on 6<sup>th</sup> of December](#), an additional product has been found: *Diapers by France retailer Auchan - own brand Mieux Vivre Environment - FSC Mix sources.*



The EEB and BEUC strongly recommend to develop a list of controversial sources that shall be avoided within the EU Ecolabel scheme. This work could be done at horizontal level for all product groups.

### **Organic cotton**

The EEB and BEUC strongly welcome the requirement that 100% of the cotton used shall be organic and call on the European Commission and Member States to support this proposal during vote.

This approach would allow the criterion to be aligned with the Nordic Swan criteria. In addition to the environmental impacts of conventional cotton, there are concerns about residual pesticides in the cotton. AHPs are in closed contact with the human body and very sensitive areas of the skin with prolonged exposure. A “certified” absence of any form of pesticide is advisable from a toxicological point of view and for the understanding of the consumer. Also from a market perspective it would be beneficial for the EU Ecolabel to have such requirement for absorbent hygiene products. Moreover, there is hardly any completion with textile grade cotton fibres for cotton used in non-woven.

### **Fragrances**

The EEB and BEUC highly welcome the extension of the fragrance-free requirements to tampons and nursing pads, in addition to products marketed as designed and intended for children.

The EEB and BEUC strongly disagree with this restriction not being made for the entire product group including female pads and strongly call on the European Commission and Member States to extend the total restriction of fragrances.

Nevertheless, if fragrances will not be completely excluded, NGOs acknowledge a significant improvement on the requirements addressing the fragrances used in female pads and strongly call on the European Commission and Member states to not undermine the current proposal. Beyond that, both organisations strongly support further improvements:

- Restrict additional allergens listed in the SCCS opinion including: Table 13-2 (contact allergens in animals); Table 13-3 (likely contact allergens); Table 13-4 (possible contact allergens).
- Under criterion “6.3.e” require labelling of the allergens listed in the SCCS opinion. The SCCS considers that the substances listed in Table 13-1, Table 13-2 and Table 13-3 represent those fragrance ingredients that the consumer should be made aware of when present in cosmetic products<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Information on the presence of all the substances given in the Table 13-1, Table 13-2 and Table 13-3 in cosmetic products is important in order to enable aimed testing of patients with contact dermatitis and to diagnose fragrance allergy without delay. Further, this information is important to the sensitised consumer as it will enable them to avoid cosmetic products, which they may not tolerate.



The use of fragrances is not a performance requirement for such products and their use leads to unnecessary exposure for the consumer. As detailed in the EEB and BEUC comments to the Ecolabel for AHP (version of October 2013)<sup>4</sup>, there are strong concerns, also within the scientific community, for the use of fragrances in female pads which justify a complete restriction in the Ecolabelled criteria. There are sufficient environmental, health and market arguments to support the NGOs request to avoid their use in Ecolabelled products (for a summary of arguments and scientific references, please see the above mentioned position).

### **Lotions**

Similar to fragrances, EEB and BEUC also call for an explicit exclusion of lotions from this product group, as they are not needed in AHPs (they are not a performance requirement). Lotions can be used on an ad-hoc basis by parents when required (which is mainly occasional), avoiding thus exposure to unnecessary chemicals.

If lotions are allowed, MIT and CMIT should be added as an additional preservative for exclusion.

### **Absorbent Polymers**

EEB and BEUC would like to reiterate its demand to reduce the limit of residual monomers allowed from 1000 ppm to 400 ppm as proposed in former drafts. Experience from Nordic Swan proves that 400 ppm is achievable for manufacturers.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.beuc.eu/publications/x2013\\_094\\_bmo\\_eeb\\_and\\_beuc\\_comments\\_ahps\\_20131206.pdf](http://www.beuc.eu/publications/x2013_094_bmo_eeb_and_beuc_comments_ahps_20131206.pdf)