

EU ECOLABEL FOR FURNITURE

BEUC and EEB comments to the criteria proposal April 2015

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No.	Comment from	Criteria	Comment
1	BEUC/EEB	Criterion 2.2: Restrictions on chemical products used in component materials from suppliers	<p>BEUC and EEB are very concerned that H334 is not present anymore in the Table of Hazards classifications. As H334 is part of the category 1, Respiratory Sensitizer, we believe that it should be included in the Group 2 of the Hazard table.</p> <p>We would really appreciate to receive from the JRC more information on the rationale of this withdrawal. We would like to remind that this omission can have negative consequences on the consumers' health as it would allow hazardous substances known to cause "allergy or asthma symptoms or breathing difficulties if inhaled" to be present in Ecolabelled furniture. Therefore, we strongly encourage the JRC reintroducing H334 in the table of hazards classifications.</p>
2	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 2.2: General hazardous substance requirements</p> <p>Assessment and verification</p>	<p>We disagree with the following approach and recommend deleting the following provisions: "Any individual component part from suppliers used in the furniture product that: (i) weigh less than 25 g and that (ii) do not come into direct contact with users during normal use shall be considered exempt from the requirements set out in this criterion."</p> <p>This approach is not acceptable as it would introduce a risk based approach to dealing with hazardous substances and allow possibly very toxic substances to be present in EU Ecolabel products. For instance, carcinogenic substances should be totally excluded without any derogation.</p> <p>This is in our view not in line with the findings of the EU Ecolabel Chemicals Horizontal Task Force paper, which states clearly that the precautionary principle should be applied when setting derogations and restrictions criteria on hazardous substances:</p>

			<p><i>"Precautionary approach: This shall guide the evaluation of derogations and substance restrictions, especially if inherently safer products are available on the market. Decisions shall be made on a case-by-case basis and based on the latest scientific evidence."</i></p> <p>This precautionary approach and the exemption that parts below 25g which do not come in contact with the skin are in contradiction. Therefore, we call on the JRC to set criteria based on a hazard-based approach and in line with the precautionary principle. This is why we recommend deleting this note in the future criteria proposal.</p>
3	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 2: General hazardous substance requirements</p> <p>"Data-lacking" or unregistered substances</p>	<p>In case a substance's hazard classification is not available, and in line with the EU Ecolabel philosophy, we would strongly recommend to apply the precautionary principle to avoid any unknown hazardous substance in the final products.</p>
4	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 2.2 Restrictions on chemical products used in component materials from suppliers</p>	<p>In <i>"Table 2. Derogations to the hazard restrictions in Table 1 and applicable conditions"</i>, we have noticed that repellents which are readily biodegradable and/or inherently biodegradable are now allowed to be derogated. We strongly call on the JRC to stick to the statement in the previous version: "The repellent or varnish and its degradation products shall be readily biodegradable and non-bioaccumulative in the aquatic environment, including aquatic sediment"</p> <p>We think that readily biodegradable substances should be preferred to the inherently biodegradable ones as these substances have a slower biodegradation in the aquatic environment.</p>

5	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 2: General hazardous substance requirements</p> <p>Flame retardants</p>	<p>The EEB and BEUC strongly recommend that products that are impregnated with hazardous flame retardants to meet fire safety standards are not awarded the EU Ecolabel, as they should not be labelled as green products of environmental excellence. Fire safety is needed but hazardous substances that may affect human health and the environment should be avoided in EU Ecolabel products, and in particular considering that safer alternatives to meet fire safety requirements are available. In this respect, EEB and BEUC recommend the introduction of a wording similar to the Blue Angel requirements for textiles requiring that:</p> <p>The flame-retarding effect should preferably be achieved by use of flame-resistant fibres or by means of the fabric structure.</p> <p>This specification could accompany the derogation conditions for flame retardants, so that the manufacturer should justify that for the specific application under consideration these alternatives are not available.</p> <p>If it is decided to still allow use of flame retardants, at least halogenated flame retardants should be excluded.</p> <p>Furthermore, EEB and BEUC strongly disagree with the derogation granted to antimony trioxide. Antimony Trioxide is a classified substance which may cause cancer (H351) and has only relevance as synergist in combination with brominated flame retardants. The fact that Antimony Trioxide is already derogated in EU Ecolabel for Textiles is not a valid rationale to justify its derogation in Furniture and it does not mean that we support it. On the contrary, we would like to point out that low-ambition requirements of one product group should not lead to the lowering of the ambition level of another product group. The logic mentioned as a rationale by the JRC is definitely not the right one to follow.</p>
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			Furthermore, less hazardous alternatives are available for textiles applications and for bed mattresses as concluded by different studies such as ENFIROi ¹ . Alternatives include flame inherent fibres, intumescent systems or fabric structure design.
6	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 3: Wood and wood-based materials Criterion 4: Plastics</p> <p>Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)</p>	<p>BEUC and EEB strongly supported the criterion that effectively banned PVC from EU Ecolabel furniture in the last draft from October 2014 and are very concerned that in the new criteria proposal, the JRC did not maintain this criterion. We call on the JRC to review this proposal which is not supported by convincing arguments and to reintroduce the total ban of PVC in EU Ecolabel furniture. Such a step back from an ambitious criterion to a permissive one goes in the wrong direction and tends to undermine the excellent reputation of the EU Ecolabel.</p> <p>There are many very well-known arguments justifying the exclusion of PVC in EU Ecolabel furniture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The restriction of PVC is consistent with the EU Ecolabel Regulation (EC 66/2010): criteria shall be determined on a scientific basis considering the whole life cycle of products. There are strong arguments that justify this restriction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM) is classified as Carcinogenic Category 1A. o PVC can have significant environmental impact especially as under uncontrolled circumstances combustion dioxins can be released from the chlorine content. We remind that dioxins are known to be highly toxic compounds that are environmental pollutants and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). o PVC is very unstable and needs loads of additives, and some of them are very toxic, such as phthalates. Most of them are classified as toxic or even included in the REACH candidate list due to their very high concern properties. Phthalates (mainly

¹ <http://greensciencepolicy.org/san-antonio-statement/#statement>

			<p>Benzyl butyl phthalate (BBP), Bis(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), Dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and Diisobutyl phthalate (DIBP) are used in high concentrations when manufacturing PVC plastic and tend to leach out of the material. So we are talking about a high volume chemical used in high concentrations in very many consumer products which present a source of exposure to phthalates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PVC undermines recycling efforts. First, toxic such as DEHP hampers the recyclability of PVC. Secondly, re-injecting hazardous substances in recycled material is in total opposition to a sound circular economy. <p>In addition, there are safer alternatives available on the market, which is proven by an increasing number of PVC-free products proposed by well-known brands like Herman Miller, Knoll, Steelcase, Teknion, IKEA. This is therefore possible to benefit from a large uptake on the market when proposing products marked as PVC-free. This tendency demonstrates that the shift toward PVC-free products and safer alternatives is ongoing. The EU Ecolabel products are supposed to be the top 10% of the best products on the market and are meant to be front-runners. It is therefore unconceivable that PVC is allowed in EU Ecolabel products and it would definitely undermine the credibility of the label.</p> <p>Furthemore, we would like to point out that the very well elaborated scientific evidence to justify the ban of PVC are mentioned in the technical reports from April and October 2014 drafted by the JRC. All arguments to ban PVC are therefore explicitly and well-explained in the last report from the JRC.</p>
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			Finally, a ban of PVC from Ecolabel furniture would be much simplify the Ecolabel criteria and it would be much easier rather than putting requirements on each PVC component.
7	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 6. Upholstery Covering Materials</p> <p>Cotton and other natural cellulosic seed fibres</p>	The EEB and BEUC welcome the reintroduction of requirements on the traceability of cotton and strongly support requirements to award the use of organic cotton. However, the requirements of a minimum of 10% organic cotton content or 20% IPM cotton content are not enough. NGOs encourage the JRC to raise the minimum requirements for organic cotton in the next draft.
8	BEUC/EEB	<p>Criterion 7.2 Polyurethane (PUR) foam</p>	<p>The EEB and BEUC strongly support the restriction made for phthalates in PUR foams in plasticisers.</p> <p>However, we disagree with the differentiation of age proposed by the JRC. As children use and chew on all kind of furniture in the house, it would be irrelevant to differentiate furniture for adults and children. Based on the precautionary approach, we strongly call the JRC to limit the sum of all 6 phthalates to 0.01% w/w for all ecolabelled furniture without differentiation of age.</p>

9	BEUC/EEB	Validity of the criteria	<p>The draft Commission Decision establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the EU Ecolabel for Furniture states that:</p> <p>"The revised criteria, as well as the related assessment and verification requirements should be valid for six years from the date of adoption of this Decision, taking into account the innovation cycle for this product group."</p> <p>BEUC and EEB have concerns regarding the new validity of the criteria which has been established to 6 years and prefer to keep the current 4 years validity.</p> <p>We hold the views that a 4 years period is already long enough for safer alternatives to come up on the market and scientific evidence-based studies to be published. In order to make the EU Ecolabel a signpost and a front-runner in the green sector, it is crucial that the scheme is given flexibility to be able to reflect the market's innovations in the criteria.</p> <p>Such an approach would ensure that the Ecolabel products stay at the forefront of innovation and comply with the highest safety standards existing on the market.</p> <p>In the meantime, we remind that even 4 year valid criteria can be prolonged in a second step if it is not relevant to revise them.</p>
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