



Cross Industry Agreement

for

The prevention of microplastic release into the aquatic environment during the
washing of synthetic textiles

Who we are

We are a group of European industry associations representing the global value chain of garments and their associated maintenance.

Through our collective memberships we represent approximately 180.000 companies, the majority of which are SMEs, employing an estimated 2.400.000 people and generating a turnover of around € 288 billion.

The issue

The unintentional release of microplastic into global marine and freshwater is of concern for human health and the environment even though the potential risks remain to be fully assessed. Recently, the focus has shifted to identify and quantify sources of microplastic pollution in order to ultimately find solutions. Research has highlighted the washing of clothing, especially those using synthetic fibres, as one of the direct sources of microplastic release into the aquatic environment.

What is happening

Research on the flow of synthetic fibres from apparel making and washing, to the sea has only recently started to emerge and is not yet fully defined and mature. However, a growing number of companies are starting to take this issue seriously; committing resources to study the scope of the problem and develop an understanding of which steps can be taken to create possible solutions.

The European Commission is exploring options for policy making and it is actively discussing with industry associations and stakeholders on how to support collaborative solutions.

An agreed definition of microplastics is necessary to investigate any further steps. The European Commission DG Environment is using a microplastic working definition¹; however, there is no standard definition at a global level and the current Commission definition, which is taken as reference by the signatories in this action, may be subject to change.

Currently there is no scientifically accepted standardised method available to measure the release of or shedding rates of microplastic over the course of a garment lifetime. With the limited research in the area showing disparities in shedding rates of up to four orders of magnitude, suggesting methods so far use inappropriate methodologies or methods of analysis.

Microplastic release could affect the whole planet and billions of people, therefore cannot be efficiently addressed by unilateral initiatives or regional legislation.

¹ a) “man-made, from conventional plastics (which means a synthetic polymer that takes a solid form when cooled); those include materials such as polyethylene, polypropylene, polystyrene, polyamide (nylon), polyethylene terephthalate, polyvinylchloride, acrylic, and polymethylacrylate, which are most often found in ocean water, as well as elastomers and silicone rubbers; all possible particle sizes below 5 mm are to be taken into account”, b) “enter the aquatic environment in the form of microplastics because they are generated during the life cycle of a product (e.g. pellet spills, car tyre wear, textiles from clothes).”

Most studies suggest the need to fill knowledge gaps with further research and the need to cooperate at cross sectorial level.

The industry associations proposing this joint agreement agree on the need for further investigation and a better understanding of the issue, the need to find feasible solutions based on science and research, together with parties in a position to apply them, and which can effectively be applied by industry, consumers, and authorities.

What can industry do

Each actor can play a role based on its knowledge and position in the value chain and beyond. Coordination can foster a quicker and more thorough understanding of the causes of the issue at stake and identify viable solutions that can be effectively applied.

Industry stakeholders can use their technical knowledge, leverage and expertise within their own domains to accelerate investigating, and finding and deploying solutions which may be explored in textile manufacture, garment making, during clothing washing and use, and in waste water treatment.

Coordination between industries and support by stakeholders can bring value to:

- 1) Define common measurement methods
Agree on a reliable and harmonised test method to identify and quantify the type of fibres present in water and in the environment
- 2) Share knowledge
Call for collaboration across all relevant industry sectors and other organisations, including research, to share information, define common priorities to fill knowledge gaps and advise on mid and long-term measures
- 3) Industrial research
Support and participate in industrial research activities to investigate feasible options to tackle the release of microplastic and to contribute towards addressing a global problem.

Next steps

Q4 2017: Preparation, identification of parties, coordination set up

April 2018: Stock-taking meeting with industry and stakeholders

Q2 2018: Second-taking meeting, public communication

Deliverables

2017: a signed agreement and an engagement group

2018: technical meeting results (e.g. proposal on test method/ other meetings)

Agreement

The undersigned acknowledge the challenges faced by society in relation to unintentional release of microplastic into the aquatic environment and, therefore, are willing to engage in a cross-industry collaboration to address the issue and find viable solutions that can be effectively and economically applied to further prevent its release and impact in the environment.

The undersigned agree that effectively addressing this problem requires coordination of efforts across different domain of knowledge and at a global level.

The undersigned agree to support finding effective and economically feasible solutions by:

- Contributing to the development of international standardised test methods to identify and quantify microplastic present in water and the environment
- Sharing information on progress of research, knowledge gaps, options and priorities
- Support and participate in industrial research for feasible and effective solutions

Coordination of efforts is meant to top up, without replacing, individual efforts and to accelerate identifying and deploying effective global solutions.

Signatories:

A.I.S.E., International Association for Soaps, Detergents and Maintenance Products

CIRFS, European Man Made Fibres Association

EOG, European Outdoor Group

EURATEX, European Textile and Apparel Confederation

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