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New chemicals, drugs added to EU water pollution watch list

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The European Parliament, in agreement with EU member states, has added 12 new substances to the EU priority list of pollutants known to pose a risk to surface water. For the first time, three pharmaceuticals will also be included on a "watch list" of emerging pollutants that could one day be added to the priority list.

Background

The European Commission has proposed adding 15 additional priority substances to the 33 pollutants regulated under the EU's Directive on Priority Substances are. They are:

- Aclonifen, Bifenox, Cypermethrin, Dicofol, Heptachlor and Quinoxifen - used for crop and plant protection.
- Cybutryne, Dichlorvos and Terbutryn - biocides used for coastings and surface protection.
- Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and
- Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCDD) - industrial chemicals.
- Dioxin and Dioxin-Like PCBs – used in the past in electronic equipment and now produced from combustion.
- 17 alpha-ethinylestradiol (EE2), 17 beta-estradiol (E2) and Diclofenac – used in drug manufacturing. EE2 is an ingredient in contraceptive drugs, while E2 is used in hormone replacement medications.

The updated directive on priority substances in water, approved on Tuesday (2 July), amends the 2000 Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the directive on environmental quality standards (EQS).

The WFD is the EU's main policy instrument for setting water anti-pollution strategies, including measures to progressively reduce emissions of chemicals listed as priority substances.

The vote adds 12 new substances to the priority list and, for the first time, also adds three pharmaceuticals on a "watch list" of emerging pollutants that could one day be added to it. There are currently 33 aquatic pollutants covered under the EU's Directive on Priority Substances.

The effects of these new substances – two hormones and a painkiller – will be monitored, with a view to including them in the priority substances list if regular reviews show it is necessary.

>> Read: [Commission to add pharma pollutants to water law](#)

More broadly, Parliament has asked the European Commission to develop a strategic approach to tackle the risks posed by pharmaceuticals in the aquatic environment.

Austrian MEP Richard Seeber (European People's Party), who steered the proposal through Parliament, said water policy required long-term efforts but that citizens should benefit in the end by getting access to clean water in every form.

"Unfortunately, studies show that we have some way to go to achieve good environmental status for chemicals, particularly in surface waters. The environmental quality standards in this new directive apply to 15 new substances, painstakingly defined with stakeholders," the MEP said.

The agreement he negotiated with the EU Council of Ministers was endorsed by 646 votes in favour, 51 against and 14 abstentions.

Stricter standards

For newly-identified substances, the maximum permitted concentrations in water set in the Environmental Quality Standards (EQS) will take effect in 2018. The aim is to achieve good chemical status for these substances by 2027.

To this end, EU member states are required to submit supplementary programmes of measures and monitoring programmes to the Commission by 2018.

Revised EQS for existing substances are to be included in River Basin Management Plans in 2015, with the aim of achieving good surface water chemical status for these substances by 2021.

Next Steps

- **2015:** Updated standards for existing substances to be included in River Basin Management Plans
- **2018:** New concentration limits start applying for newly-identified substances
- **By 2018:** EU member states to submit monitoring programmes to the European Commission for newly-identified substances
- **2021:** Target date for achieving good chemical status for existing substances (revised standards)
- **2027:** Target date for achieving good chemical status for newly-identified substances