



WWF

POSITION
PAPER

JUNE
2011

Washing our Dishes and Clothes without Polluting our Rivers and Seas

The importance of an EU restriction of phosphate
detergents for laundry and dishwashers

EUROPEANS CARE ABOUT THE STATE OF THEIR WATER

According to a 2009 Eurobarometer survey, more than 80% of European citizens are concerned about water quality in their countries and three quarters consider chemical pollution as the main threat to a country's water environment¹. 83% also said the impact of a product on the environment plays an important role in their purchasing decisions.

Algae growing in rock pools on rocky coast, Langviksskar, Stockholm Archipelago, Sweden, June 2009.

¹ Flash Eurobarometer on Water, 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/participation/pdf/eurobarometer_summary.pdf

EVEN THE SIMPLE TASK OF WASHING DISHES CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT



THE EU
MUST
ACT NOW TO
RESTRICT
PHOSPHATE
DETERGENTS ACROSS
THE EU.

Many cleaning detergents commonly sold on the shelves of European supermarkets contain high concentrations of phosphates, and other phosphorus compounds, which are harmful for the environment. When household wastewater carrying phosphates is discharged into our rivers, lakes and seas, it contributes to the problematic growth of algae, which reduces levels of oxygen in the water, killing other aquatic life which also depends on oxygen to survive. This process of 'nutrient pollution' is often referred to as eutrophication.

According to a study published by the European Commission in 2007, detergents used every year in the 25 EU Member States contained approximately 110,000 tonnes of phosphorus. Much of this ends up in our rivers, lakes and seas. One kilogram of phosphorus can produce up to 500 kg of algae in the marine environment² causing vast dead zones in our seas completely devoid of fish, plants and other aquatic life.

An EU Regulation to restrict phosphates in detergents is now being discussed in Brussels and national capitals. In November

2010, the European Commission issued a proposal to limit the use of phosphorus in laundry detergents as of January 2013, but excluded dishwashing products because of an assumed lack of viable phosphate-free alternatives³.

WWF criticises the Commission's decision highlighting that 19 out of 27 Member States already have measures in place to reduce phosphates in laundry detergents and some, such as Sweden and France, not to mention other markets like the United States, have also banned phosphate-based dishwashing detergents. This means that technical and economically viable alternatives not only exist, but are being widely used.

WWF urges the Members of the European Parliament and Council to vote now for a phase out of all phosphate detergents, which will benefit not only the environment but also citizens and progressive industries.

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0234:FIN:en:PDF>

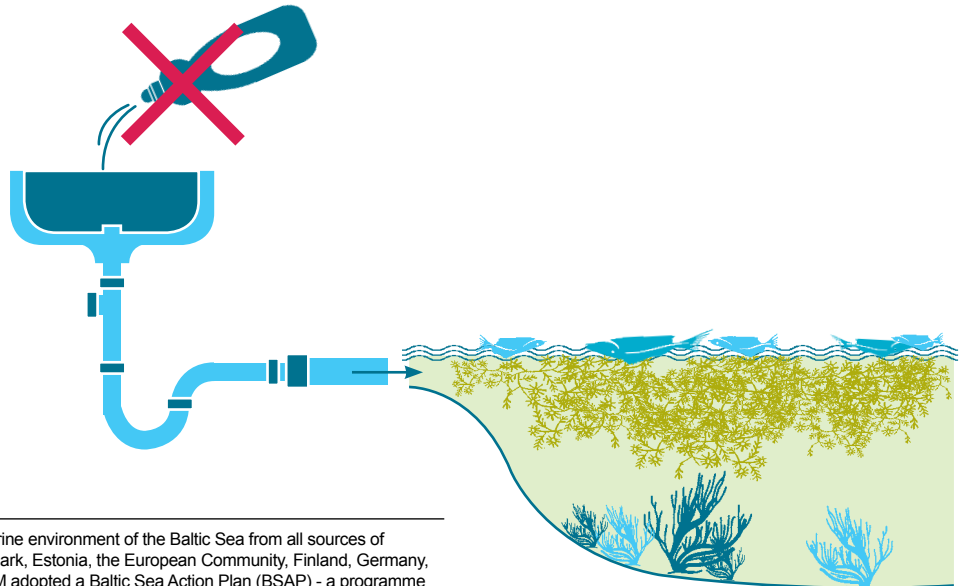
³ COM(2007) 234 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0234:FIN:en:PDF>

PHOSPHATE DETERGENTS ARE TRANSFORMING OUR RIVERS AND SEAS INTO DEAD AREAS

Phosphate detergents are among three major sources of phosphates in the aquatic environment across the EU contributing to between 16% and 24% of the phosphate load in the Danube River and the Black Sea respectively. The other two major sources are agricultural activities and human waste.

In 2005, the total amount of phosphorus entering the Baltic Sea reached 30,200 tonnes. Nearly half of the phosphorus discharged into the Baltic Sea comes from municipal wastewater; phosphates from detergents contribute up to 24% (or 1/4) of all phosphorus inputs to the Baltic Sea. The remaining contribution of phosphorus is received as runoff from agriculture in the region.

The Helsinki Convention⁴ has calculated that in order to achieve an acceptable environmental status regarding water transparency and the occurrence of algal blooms, yearly emissions of phosphorus in the Baltic Sea must be significantly reduced.



⁴ The Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM, works to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution through intergovernmental co-operation between Denmark, Estonia, the European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. In 2007 HELCOM adopted a Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) - a programme aimed to restore the good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. <http://www.helcom.fi>

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



November 2010

EU Commission proposes to restrict phosphate in laundry detergents by 2013 (review clause mandated the EU Commission to come up with the report in 2007)



June and September 2011

European Parliament votes on its position in the Environment Committee and Plenary Session



Autumn 2011

European Council is expected to reach agreement on its position



2012

Possible Second Reading agreement



1 January 2013

If agreement is reached, entry into force of EU restrictions on phosphate for laundry detergents



1 January 2015

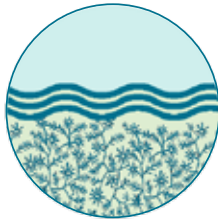
Expected entry into force of the EU restriction on phosphate for dishwashing detergents, if agreed

The total amount of phosphorus entering the Baltic Sea reached 30,200 tonnes in 2005.



PHASING OUT OF PHOSPHATES IN LAUNDRY AND AUTOMATIC DISHWASHER DETERGENTS = ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

**PHOSPHATES FROM
DISHWASHER
DETERGENTS
INCREASE THE RISK
OF EUTROPHICATION**



Over the last years, a substantial increase in sales of automatic dishwashers has been observed across the EU with a corresponding rise in sales of dishwasher detergents. In Sweden for example about 50% of households have installed a dishwasher. The increasing amount of phosphates discharged in our waters as a result of this increase will subsequently contribute to the eutrophication of EU seas, lakes and rivers.

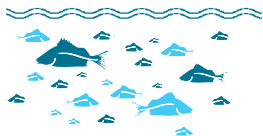
**SAFER
ALTERNATIVES
ALREADY EXIST AND
ARE SUCCESSFULLY
USED INSIDE AND
OUTSIDE THE EU**



Environmentally friendly alternatives, such as phosphate-free detergent products have been available on the market for more than 30 years. Some of these products have passed the rigorous tests of various eco-labelling institutions. Phosphate-free automatic dishwasher detergents represented 69% of the Swedish market in 2009. Also outside the EU there is an increasing demand for these products: in Norway dishwashing detergents are almost exclusively phosphate free⁵. In the United States phosphates in laundry detergents have been banned for nearly two decades and 16 states have extended the ban to household automatic dishwasher detergents.

⁵ Swedish Chemical Inspectorate, Fosfater i konsumenttillgängliga maskindiskmedel. Rapport från ett regeringsuppdrag. September 2007.

REDUCING PHOSPHATES IN DETERGENTS WILL BENEFIT THE ENVIRONMENT



Estimates have shown that the introduction of phosphate-free detergents reduces one third of the total source of phosphorus in sewage⁶. An evaluation of the Swiss ban on phosphates in laundry detergents reported a 30-40% reduction of phosphorus arriving at the sewage treatment plants. Research done in the United States shows that a detergent ban could reduce phosphorus concentrations by 50%⁷.

...AND THE ECONOMY



In its Impact Assessment⁸, the EU Commission concludes that a “total ban of detergent phosphate would be the most effective policy option for reducing the eutrophication risk throughout the EU and would in particular also address transboundary flows of phosphates in river basins or marine waters shared by several Member States”. It estimates that under current conditions the elimination of all phosphates in detergents would reduce operational costs of wastewater treatment in the order of €10 million to €693 million per year. It also cal-

culates that 100% removal of phosphates from all wastewater by treatment plants would lead to very high capital costs and higher operational costs.

CREATING A LEVEL-PLAYING FIELD IN THE EU MARKET FOR MANUFACTURERS



The current situation where some Member States have introduced restrictions on phosphates in both laundry and dishwashing detergents and others have not, undermines national restrictions and does not provide a clear signal for manufacturers to phase out phosphates in detergents. A mandatory restriction will establish a level-playing field within the EU market and facilitate internal trade. The large, mainly international, producers of laundry detergents have already adapted to various market demands of supplying phosphorus-free laundry and dishwasher detergents with acceptable technical performance.

⁶ SSNC (1998) Vad har miljömärkning av kemtekniska produkter inneburit för reningsverken? Report by Per Rosander, Beckérus & Rosander HB for Kemi och Miljö AB on behalf of the Swedish Society for nature Conservation (SSNC).

⁷ Litke, D. W. (1999). Review of Phosphorus Control Measures in the United States and Their Effects on Water Quality. Water Resources Investigations Report 99-4007. Denv

⁸ EU Commission's Impact Assessment (2010) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2010:1277:FIN:EN:PDF>

HIGH-PERFORMANCE PHOSPHATE-FREE DISHWASHER DETERGENTS ALREADY EXIST

Progressive companies have been producing phosphate-free laundry and dishwashing detergents for years and with very good performances. Consumer Report has rated for example Ecover's dishwasher tablets as one of the top three low-phosphate detergents on the market with best performance for both food removal and grease cutting⁹. WWF supports companies which are investing in innovative products that are effective and respectful of the environment.

A profitable phosphate-free market in Sweden

The banning of phosphorus in automatic dishwashing detergents has been announced for several years in Sweden and comes into force on 1 July 2011. Between 2005 and 2007 the proportion of phosphorus-free automatic dishwasher detergents on the Swedish market grew from 10% to 27%. When only domestic production was considered, 74% were phosphate-free. This suggests that the Swedish producers adapted to the ban more easily than producers of imported products¹⁰. Between 2007 and 2009 the domestic production of phosphate-free automatic dishwasher detergents continued to grow from 74% to 96%¹¹.

WWF ASKS

- European Parliament and Member States to support the European Commission's proposal to limit phosphorus content in all laundry detergents on the EU market to 0.5% of the total weight of the product (or similar) applying from 1 January 2013.
- European Parliament and Member States to limit phosphorus content in all automatic dishwashing detergents on the EU market to 0.5% of the total weight of the product (or similar) by 1 January 2013 and not later than 2015.
- European Commission to evaluate and present a legislative proposal, to restrict phosphorus in institutional and industrial detergents by 2015.

⁹ www.consumerreports.org – February 2009

¹⁰ Swedish Chemical Inspectorate, Fosfater i konsumenttillgängliga maskindiskmedel. Rapport från ett regeringsuppdrag. September 2007.

¹¹ Swedish Chemical Inspectorate (2010) Nationell reglering av fosfat i tvättmedel och maskindiskmedel för enskilt bruk.



HOW MEMBER STATES ARE MOVING TOWARDS THE PHASE-OUT OF PHOSPHATE-BASED DETERGENTS



Dishwasher detergents:



Laundry detergent:



Green:

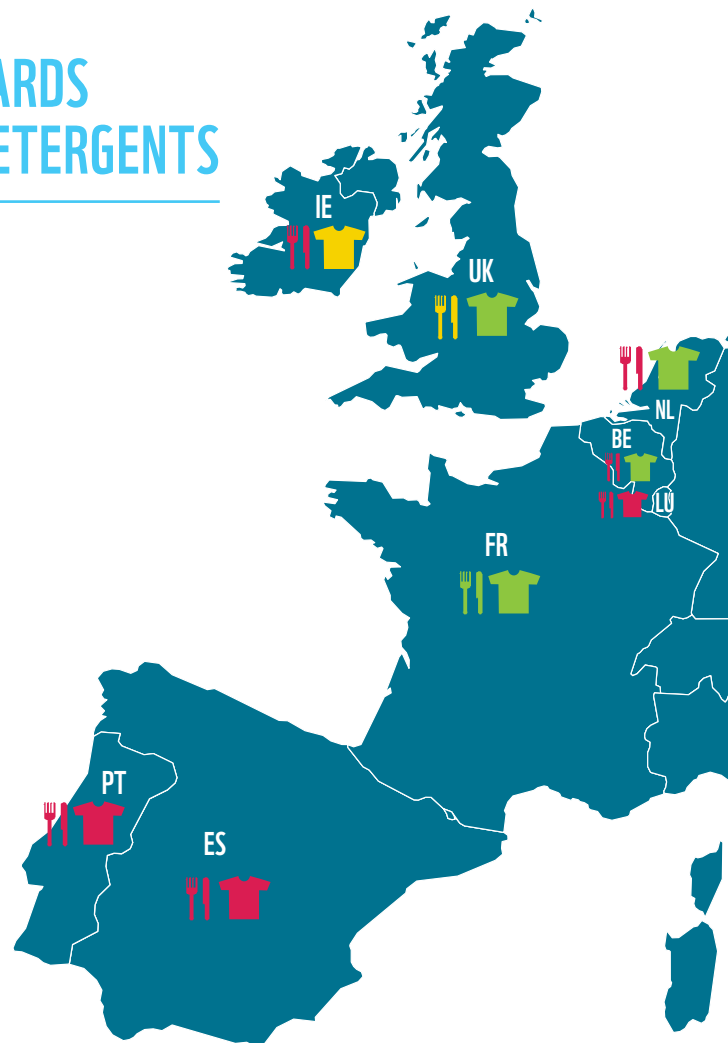
regulation in place (max 0.5% of phosphate allowed)

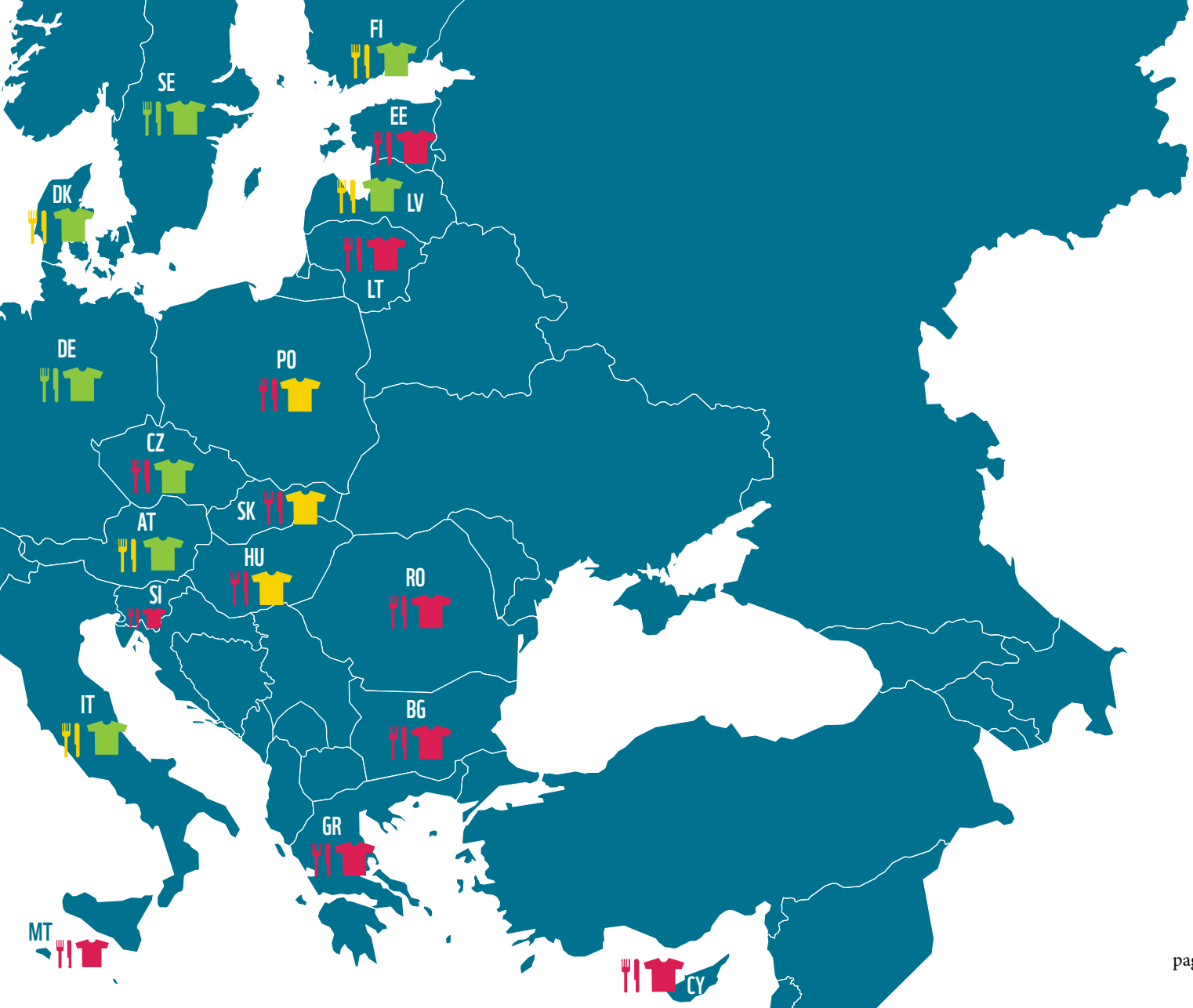
Yellow:

regulation or voluntary initiatives in preparation or already in place but threshold for phosphate content is higher than 0.5%

Red:

no regulation in place





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WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme

For contact information from each of the nine
Baltic Sea countries, please visit:
www.panda.org/balticcontacts



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and
to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

www.wwf.eu

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