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The European Risk Assessment on Organotins: Update from the Tin Stabilizers Association

A risk assessment on organotin compounds is presently being conducted for the European Commission. This assessment covers the uses of organotins as heat stabilizers for PVC and as catalysts for various chemical processes. Their use as pesticides and as marine antifoulants was not included. The report from the consultants performing this risk assessment is now under review by the Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (CSTEE), which recently released its draft evaluation of this study.

The Tin Stabilizers Association (TSA) is fully aware of these activities, and has been actively involved throughout this process. TSA and its European counterpart (ESPA/ETINSA) have provided extensive information about these products to the consultants working on this study, and many member companies have provided significant background information and results from their internal research.

TSA and its European counterparts also are well aware of the "data gaps" that the CSTEE feels still exist in the report as it currently stands. Additional work is already underway – and was underway before the CSTEE evaluation was released – to fill those gaps identified by the CSTEE and to provide more exposure data. This work is in the final stages, and the results will be provided to the CSTEE as soon as they are complete.

It's important to note that the report raised concerns in a few areas where organotin compounds are no longer used. For instance, because of previous studies, manufacturers had agreed to take an aggressive approach to product stewardship and discontinue the use of organotin catalysts in baking papers, where the potential for risk had been raised. Regarding the possible risk mentioned by the CSTEE in toys and children's products, it is unlikely that tin stabilizers are used to any significant extent in these applications, since other products are better suited to this use. Nevertheless, the industry intends to investigate this question. In the meantime, the amount of potential exposure the CSTEE suggests might be associated with these applications is below that which might create a health concern – a conclusion based on the extensive data that already exists on tin stabilizers.

In addition, the CSTEE raised some concerns about organotins used as biocides and pesticides, even though these were not part of the risk assessment. These particular biocide chemicals are triorganotins, and are very different from the mono and diorganotins used as stabilizers and catalysts. More importantly, the major application for these triorganotins, in antifouling paints, has been banned in Europe and it is puzzling why the CSTEE chose to include them in their evaluation.

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In the weeks ahead, TSA and ETINSA will be working on just these issues. In the meantime, the tin stabilizer industry is confident the additional data now being collected will confirm that current applications of tin stabilizers are safe, do not pose a risk to human health or the environment, and that tin stabilizers can continue to be used with confidence in the numerous applications on which society depends.

The Tin Stabilizers Association was established in 1999 to promote the use of tin stabilizers in vinyl plastics. Its member companies are Akcros Chemicals America, Atofina Chemicals, Inc., Baerlocher USA, Crompton Corporation, Reagens Canada, LTD, and Rohm and Haas Company. TSA works to provide accurate information about the quality and safety of tin stabilizers and to differentiate the use of tin stabilizers from other tin-based applications. TSA cooperates with other organizations throughout the world to promote product stewardship, conduct scientific studies and enhance communications related to tin stabilizers. For more information, visit www.tinstabilizers.org.

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