

## CONSIDERATION

# MICROPLASTICS

EURATEX considerations on EC public consultation “Investigating options for reducing releases to the environment of microplastics”

Summary of EURATEX consideration in October 2017  
(Full position paper available at EURATEX)

## INTRODUCTION

Microplastic in marine and freshwater environments globally are of significant concern for human health and the environment. The stakeholders' attention has shifted to identify and quantify sources of microplastic pollution to ultimately identify potential solutions. As studies intensify, washing of clothing is seen as one of the sources of microplastics release. EURATEX takes the opportunity of the European Commission public consultation to share insights and recommendations to address this global issue.



## DEFINITION OF MICROPLASTICS

Looking for solutions requires an agreed and harmonised identification of the problem and then of its source. The European Commission DG Environment in a study carried out by consulting Eunomia is using a working definition for microplastics which is also used by EURATEX when drafting this paper. Nonetheless, a standardised definition is still lacking. In addition, in currently seen reports, there are many references to the term microfibers which might include oil-based man-made fibers (synthetic polymers), cellulosic (e.g. viscose) or natural fibers (e.g. cotton). A consistent definition is essential to avoid confusion.

## ASSESSING THE PROBLEM

EU policy-makers are currently looking at clothes washing as one of the possible sources of microplastics release. A lack of standardised analytical method hinders the exact quantification and source identification of the release. Confusion may also arise by assessing studies using different approaches, different methods and occasionally mixing natural or cellulosic fibres with synthetic fibres.

Major source of release appears to include wearing out of car tyres, road markings and pellet; washing of clothing appears to be the following main potential source. Regarding textiles, it is important to consider that in terms of quantities the higher share of garment sold in Europe is imported from non-EU countries.

## LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

Firstly, understanding the problem and finding solutions urgently requires a standardised testing method to measure the release and shedding of microplastics from clothes. Such methods would differentiate between synthetic fibers shed from textiles and other types of microplastics.

Secondly, microplastic pollution as a global issue requires joint action from all steps in the chain from textile and garment manufacturing to consumers washing and drying habits to waste water treatments.

Many business stakeholders are already carrying out desk and laboratory research to investigate solutions. EURATEX believes in the value of bringing these efforts together and considers options in making of textile products at fibre, fabric and garment level, as well as in washing and use stage and water treatments (technical insights have been provided in the public consultation). Though indicative and still based on limited information, these starting considerations are shared to support discussion and pull efforts together to address an issue at global scale.

## POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD TO TACKLE UNINTENTIONAL RELEASE OF MICROPLASTICS FROM CLOTHING

### 1. Common measurement

Urgently agree on a reliable and harmonised test method to identify and quantify the type of fibres present in waste water.

### 2. Shared priorities

Call for collaboration across all relevant industries and stakeholders including washing and drying machine manufacturers and waste water treatment plants as well as research, within and beyond the EU borders, to agree on priorities and how to fill knowledge gaps.

### 3. Industrial research

Support and engage in industrial research to investigate feasible options to address the release of microplastic globally.



### The European Textile and Apparel industry

A key European manufacturing sector made up of 177,700 companies, 99% are SMEs, producing primarily in Europe and integrated in the global value chains.

This industry is transforming since 2004 when it starts to move away from mass market commodity goods to focus on high value, innovative and sustainable products and production which deliver garments to people as well as key materials for personal protection, sport, automotive, aerospace, construction, medical, and many other applications.

Europe is the world's second largest exporter of textile products generating €171 billion turnover and employing 1.7 million people.