



The case of titanium dioxide: paints industry warns against EU classification

- **Criticism of classification as a hazardous substance regardless of demonstrable safety**
- **Warning against far-reaching consequences for industry and consumers**
- **International criticism of threatening trade restrictions**
- **Unnecessary warnings cause uncertainty among consumers**
- **The alternative: European dust limit values at the workplace**

Frankfurt, 8 April 2019. **A few days before the EU decision on the classification of the white pigment titanium dioxide as a hazardous substance, the German paint industry sharply criticises the classification proposal and highlights the unintended consequences e.g. for recycling. The main point underlying the industry's criticism is that titanium dioxide is to be deemed a hazardous substance even though it is demonstrably safe.**

With a share of just under 60%, the manufacturers of paints, coatings and printing inks are the largest customers for titanium dioxide pigments and would be significantly affected by the proposed classification. Dr Martin Engelmann (director-general of the German paints and printing inks industry association VdL) explains: "The reason behind the classification proposal is the fear of workers developing lung cancer due to exposure to titanium dioxide dust emissions in industrial production and processing."

Engelmann notes: "From the scientific perspective, the Commission proposal lacks any basis. It simply relies on only one study which is over 20 years old. In that study, rats were forced to inhale titanium dioxide powder over a very long period of time. Experts unanimously hold that the thus triggered reaction is not substance-specific for titanium dioxide but characteristic of dust particles in general." According to Engelmann, other studies do not indicate any hazard to humans either. Quite the contrary: Studies conducted over several decades and involving ca. 24,000 workers in titanium dioxide factories did not show any increased risk of tumour formation. Engelmann: "Titanium dioxide is safe. Checks by the German statutory accident insurance confirm that there is not a single case of a recognised occupational disease due to titanium dioxide in this country. Consumers have hardly any contact with titanium dioxide powder, so that a hazard can be excluded – also from the EU Commission's angle."

It is becoming clearer what consequences a classification of titanium dioxide as a suspected carcinogen would have for industry, the economy and consumers. For example, waste with a titanium dioxide content from 1% - e.g. plastic packaging such as yoghurt cups or construction and demolition waste – would need to be dealt with as "hazardous waste" in the future.

Engelmann warns: "The costs of waste disposal would explode." He also emphasises that this would make the ambitious targets in plastics recycling impossible to achieve. The exemption under

EU waste law, as announced by the Commission, would not change this, since it would take years to implement a workable solution.

Meanwhile, international criticism is getting stronger too: Not only the USA but also Canada, Mexico, Japan, Australia and New Zealand have objected to the proposal, because *“it might be unnecessarily disruptive to billions of dollars”* in international trade. The trading partners recommend postponing a classification until open questions have been clarified. Engelmann: “Speaking in metaphors, the Commission should switch off its autopilot regarding titanium dioxide and take criticism of the proposal seriously.” He sees the classification of titanium dioxide as a “litmus test for the European chemicals policy”, as it would impact all substances in powder form.

The industry renews its criticism of the warnings proposed for paints, coatings and printing inks which would demand every bucket or can to bear the labelling *“Warning! Hazardous droplets may be formed when sprayed.”* Engelmann comments: “We cannot understand why all paints and coatings should be labelled, although only very few of them are suitable for spray applications. Moreover, titanium dioxide is firmly embedded in the binder matrix of paints and coatings so that titanium dioxide cannot be inhaled at all.”

As a solution, the VdL proposes a European harmonisation of dust limit values at the workplace. Engelmann: “The discussed risks are solely about dust inhalation. Protection against dust is an important issue; in most EU Member States it is ensured by workplace limit values. Germany is an international pioneer in this field.” Instead of the proposed titanium dioxide classification, the harmonisation of limit values for dust in Europe, as already initiated by the EU Commission, should be driven forward.

With a view to the forthcoming European Parliament elections, Engelmann states: “Should the Commission maintain its controversial proposal, this would be the proverbial grist to the mill of those who reproach the EU for wild overregulation. The case of titanium dioxide will show whether common sense can still prevail in Brussels.”

Background information: Titanium dioxide is extracted from the mineral ilmenite and has been used industrially for 100 years. Given the high light-scattering capacity of its crystals, TiO₂ has the highest opacity of all white pigments which makes it indispensable for the manufacture of paints and colour shades. There are no equivalent alternatives in paint production.

Verband der deutschen Lack- und Druckfarbenindustrie e.V. (VdL) represents some 200 paint and printing ink companies with ca. 25,000 staff in contacts with politicians, public authorities, science and media. The VdL stands for over 90% of the industry which is characterised by small and medium-sized enterprises.

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