

“The safe use of biocides and other chemicals is our main concern”

In the textile industry, a lot of chemicals are used. These include closed-circuit biocides, which pose a hazard to human health. As a textile business, how can you use these products in a safe way? And what obligations do you need to take into account? Ronny Geurs, HSE manager and responsible for health, safety and the environment at floor manufacturer Tarkett, and Bruno Eggermont, environment and energy consultant at employers' organisation Fedustria, explain.

Biocides are pesticides that are used to deter or destroy harmful organisms, ranging from bacteria and viruses to insects and vermin. Some biocides pose a high risk to health. These belong to the 'closed circuit'. For instance, they can cause irritation or be toxic.

Within the textile sector there are three common uses of biocides: protecting finished textile against moulds, moths or other unwanted organisms, pre-treating textile to give it antibacterial or insect-repellent properties, and disinfecting textile at industrial laundries, for instance in hospitals.

At Tarkett, only one biocide is used today: an insecticide based on the active substance permethrin. HSE manager Ronny Geurs: “During the dyeing, we treat our strands of wool with this product to protect our carpets against moths and beetles.”



“Safety above all”

RONNY GEURS, HSE-MANAGER AND RESPONSIBLE FOR HEALTH, SAFETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT AT TARKETT

Toxic substances in waste water

Attention must be paid not only to the operators' safety, but also to the protection of the environment. Permethrin is very toxic to aquatic life. Therefore, each company is imposed a discharge limit in the environmental licence.

Bruno Eggermont: “As a sector we apply the Best Available Techniques, which are the techniques that score best for environmental criteria and at the same time are affordable and technically feasible. This way, we prevent toxic substances from ending up in the waste water.”

Tarkett's waste water undergoes careful treatment before it is discharged. Ronny Geurs: “The waste water from our application baths – in which the textile is treated with dyes and permethrin – and that of the rinsing baths – where the textile is washed – contains a limited concentration of chemicals. We treat this waste water in our own water treatment system before discharging it. We even reuse part of the treated water in the production process. Every month, we test the waste water for a large number of parameters, to ensure that it can be safely discharged. In addition, we regularly perform ecotoxicity tests to find out whether the waste water is toxic to aquatic life.”



“Dealing with chemicals such as biocides with caution is a permanent point of attention in textile companies”

BRUNO EGGERMONT, ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY CONSULTANT AT FEDUSTRIA

Mandatory registration

If you want to use closed circuit biocides, you have to register first at www.biocide.be, the website of the Federal Public Service Public Health. At the beginning of 2019 the law was changed and simplified for professional users.

“The registration obligation is not new to us,” Ronny Geurs says. “We have been registering the purchase and use of biocides via the online tool for several years. As a professional user it is now enough to confirm each year. However, we continue to keep accurate track of which biocides we buy and use.”

“The other companies in the textile sector are also well aware of the registration duty,” says Bruno Eggermont, environment and energy consultant at Fedustria. “It is our job as a federation to inform textile companies thoroughly in this respect and provide support.”

Gloves, safety goggles and waterproof shoes

Closed circuit biocides are classified as hazardous substances. The hazards and risks are described in the authorisation act and in the safety data sheets. Permethrin, for instance, can cause an allergic skin reaction and serious eye irritation. Hence, contact with the skin and eyes must be avoided at all costs. Ronny Geurs: “Our operators are obliged to wear suitable gloves and sealed safety goggles. In the workplace, everyone wears suitable work clothes as a standard. In the departments where chemicals are used, employees also wear waterproof safety shoes.”

“In fact, waterproof safety shoes are not mandatory when using permethrin. Nevertheless, we impose their use. As the HSE manager, I study and assess the risks for our employees so we can decide on the appropriate personal protective equipment. Safety above all. In the dyeing department, the operators work with several chemicals in a wet environment. Therefore, waterproof shoes are a must to prevent chemicals from coming into contact with the skin in case of spills.”

“Textile companies are aware of the hazards and risks of chemicals and handle them in a safe way,” Bruno Eggermont states. “Making a risk assessment and imposing protective measures are an integral part of their health and safety policy. At the same time, they see to it that biocides are only used for the applications for which they are authorised. These applications are mentioned in the authorisation act of the product or possibly in the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC), both of which can be found in the list of authorised biocides at www.biocide.be.”

The FPS Public Health informs

Want to know more about the safe use of closed circuit biocides, the risks involved or the obligation to register? You can find plenty of information on www.biocide.be.

You can also find a brochure and an information sheet adapted to the textile sector:

- **Biocides in de textile sector. What do you need to know as a professional user?** (for the employer/prevention advisor)
- **Working safely with chemicals. Biocides: recognise them and protect yourself!** (for operators in the workplace)



BIOCIDES?
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the necessary
caution

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