

Press Release No. 51/2010

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Federal Environment Agency bans corrosive detergent "Por Çöz" UBA and BfR protecting consumers from descaler and rust remover high in nitric acid content

The Federal Environment Agency, in consultation with the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR), has banned the trade and sale of the detergent Por Çöz. The product contains at least 20% nitric acid and thus poses a serious risk to health. The ban is temporary and will be in effect until a final decision is taken by the European Commission. The descaler and rust remover is available mainly in supermarkets that supply Turkish products.

Bronchial catarrh

"This is the first time that UBA is enacting a clause in the Detergents Regulation, which provides for a temporary ban on cleaning agents and detergents when there is proof of risk to the environment or health", said UBA President Jochen Flasbarth.

UBA has advised the monitoring authorities in the federal states to check for compliance with the ban on import and trade of the detergent. UBA has also advised the EU Commission and other Member States so that they might also initiate similar measures.

BfR position

This move is founded on the position taken by the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) on detergents with nitric acid content. The conclusion reached in the announcement is that certain detergents with a nitric acid content of over 20% harbour a disproportionately high health risk for consumers", says BfR President Professor Dr. Dr. Andreas Hensel. Besides its corrosive properties upon direct contact with skin or if swallowed, there is also a health risk if nitric acid vapours or nitrous gases (e.g. NO₂) released from nitric acid are inhaled.

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Health risks of detergents with nitric acid content

The use of nitric acid-based detergents can result in formation of worrisome concentrations of nitric acid and nitrous gases in indoor air. Under certain circumstances these substances can have a serious impact on health, as shown by BfR modelling. German poison information centres have already reported 134 cases of serious health damage as a result of contact with nitric acid-based descaler and rust removers.

Inhalation of nitric acid vapours can trigger irritations of the mucous membranes in the respiratory tract, bronchitis, pneumonia, and can lead to toxic pulmonary oedema within a typical latency period of 3 to 30 hours.

The formation of nitrous gases poses yet another health risk as they can release nitric acid under certain conditions. The compounds in the gas mixture can have acutely toxic or carcinogenic effects.

Dessau-Roßlau, 28 October 2010