

LIFE-FLAREX

Mitigation of environmental impact caused by Flame Retardant textile finishing chemicals studying their non-toxic alternatives

PRESS RELEASE

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LIFE-FLAREX Stakeholder's Workshop attracts companies and organizations from 8 European countries to discuss on alternative flame retardants

LIFE-FLAREX is a project co-funded by LIFE Programme that aims to reduce the impact on the environment, human health and worker safety, of current harmful Flame Retardants used in the textile industry and consider alternatives, by analyzing their environmental impact and technical functionalities and promoting best practices for the sector

The LIFE-FLAREX Stakeholder's workshop was held in Brussels on January 16th 2018 and it was co-organized by FLAREX partnership, EURATEX-The European Apparel and Textile Confederation and the European Chemical Agency (ECHA).

This event brought together a total of 32 relevant stakeholders (chemical producers, textile industries, industrial associations and groups of interest) coming from organizations in 8 European countries (Belgium, France, The Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Finland, United Kingdom and Spain).

The event raised constructive comments towards the flame retardant and a selection of representative textile products carried out by FLAREX project as a preparatory action, and provided large interest in collaboration with the project from relevant stakeholders, as well as highlighted ways forward and challenges to chemical replacement in textile sector.

The aim of the workshop was to discuss among experts of different competences the advances and alternatives for implementation of chemical substitution policies in the textile industry, particularly on



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the use of flame retardants for home textiles/contract markets including carpets, upholstery for furniture and other products such as mattresses or curtains.

During the discussions, several flame retardant producers mentioned that they have alternatives available or ready to market with performance matching conventional technology. These solutions are still more expensive due to lack of demand, according to the producers, and their applicability in the textile sector still needs to be examined. In addition to the cost, participating textile companies pointed out that alternatives need to match specific requirements of textiles such as fabric composition and therefore the applicability of alternatives shall be done on a case-by-case basis.

There was a debate on the lack of harmonized regulations on fire safety and public procurement requirements across the union, even at regional level, which increases the costs for SMEs and limits the benefits of the single market. Several participants highlighted the need to harmonize public procurement across Europe including sustainability parameters in the selection criteria to favor the shift to more sustainable flame retardants and increase the competitiveness of European SMEs in the textile sector.

A recurrent topic emerged during the workshop on the lack of market pull for alternative flame retardants, meaning consumers (individuals and organizations such as public bodies) are often not aware of flame retardants used in textiles to comply with safety specifications nor their consequences for the environment and health. Awareness on the consumer side might lead to different purchasing choices. Moreover, the switch to safer alternatives, where possible, is mainly driven by the existence of a legislation imposing the limitation of the use of certain hazardous substances. In absence of such legislation and in the absence of feasible alternatives there is no strong driver for substitution towards safer alternatives.

LIFE-FLAREX team has just published a full report, available on the project website, with further details on the outcomes from the Stakeholder's workshop and the participation.

LIFE-FLAREX project next steps are to assess and demonstrate the suitability of alternative flame retardants by benchmarking with conventional products, first at lab scale and later at industrial level. The demonstration will include technical performance, environmental impact, exposure and toxicological assessments. In parallel, further workshops will be organized at regional level in Italy, Czech Republic and Spain to raise awareness and at later stages of the project at EU level presenting the key results of the project to European-wide Stakeholders.



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FLAREX Stakeholder's workshop during the plenary session

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The project coordinator is AEI TÈXTILS, the Catalan cluster of technical textiles. Six additional partners complete the consortium: two Spanish technological centers/research institutes: LEITAT and the Institute of Advanced Chemistry of Catalonia (CSIC), both members of AEI TÈXTILS, the Belgian textile research center CENTEXBEL and three technical textile clusters: ATEVAL from Spain, POINTEX from Italy and CLUTEX from the Czech Republic.

LIFE-FLAREX's objective is to reduce the impact on the environment, human health and workers' safety, of the current flame retardants used in the textile sector, and their future alternatives, by identifying which are the best technologies available, both from the performance and from the sustainability point



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of view. This will be achieved with the development of the analysis of their environmental impact and functionalities in order to promote the substitution amongst the manufacturers.

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