

Millions of imported tyres may not comply to EU Regulation TESTING PROGRAMME FINDS 11% OF TYRES NON-COMPLIANT WITH EU BAN ON USE OF HIGH- PAH OILS.

ETRMA urges EU and national authorities to intensify and broaden testing and enforcement activities.

Geneva, March 1st, 2011. The ETRMA (European Tyre and Rubber Manufacturers' Association) today announced the findings of the first phase of its tyre testing program, which tested tyres sold throughout the European Union for the use of high-PAH oils. These oils are banned from use under European Regulation¹ for all tyres produced and sold on the EU market after January 1st, 2010. 11% of all tested tyres were found to be non-compliant.

Over several months up to February 18th, 2011, ETRMA completed its testing on a sample of 110 tyres produced under 45 brand names for sale in several of the largest tyre markets in the EU. Of the 45 brands surveyed, 12 tyres produced under 9 different brand names were found to be non-compliant, containing PAH levels prohibited by REACH, and therefore being sold illegally on the EU market.

The test program covered a variety of tyre types (passenger car, light truck, motorcycle and industrial tyres) produced in the main production countries, both within and outside the European Union. Markings on the tyres indicated that they were produced in 16 countries, including 9 EU countries and 7 non-EU countries and from a total of 92 different production plants in these countries. The 12 non-compliant tyres were all imported.

“While eleven percent is a cause for concern, it does take on staggering dimensions when one considers the fact that some 100 million tyres are imported into the EU and placed on the market each year,” states Dr Francesco Gori President of ETRMA. “This may very well just be the tip of the iceberg.”

Most producers of tyres, both in the EU and internationally, have completed their transition to production with low-PAH oils and are therefore already fully compliant with the EU regulation. “All tyres produced within the EU tested REACH compliant,” states Dr Gori, adding “ensuring that their products are fully REACH compliant from the start has also demanded a significant investment of over €100m from our members.”

¹ (1907/2006/EC (REACH), Annex XVII, entry 50)

These illegal tyres on the European market raise major concerns about the enforcement of REACH and also future legislation aimed to enhance the safety of tyres and of other products. “If manufacturers, importers and distributors are allowed to ignore the current legislation, this is likely to compromise also the effectiveness of upcoming legislation such as the tyre label legislation that will come into effect in 2012,” states Dr Gori. Non-adherence to the tyre label legislation could very well result in consumers being misled into buying inferior tyres with inferior performance characteristics.”

In light of the findings of its first test program, the ETRMA calls on the EU and national authorities to intensify and broaden their own testing and enforcement activities. Certain national authorities, for example in the United Kingdom, have already announced projects in the context of REACH enforcement, to ensure that the marketing ban on high-PAH oils in tyres is secured in conformity with the EU law. It is important to note that each Member State has its own penalty policy to ensure compliance with the EU ban.

“The ETRMA and its members have endorsed the full range of EU regulations governing the tyre industry; regulations which have demanded significant investments for compliance by our members. As such, we request urgent attention be given to a clear, coherent and coordinated market surveillance program that ensures a level playing field for all tyre producers. Legislation without effective follow-up and enforcement is damaging. Allowing non-compliant tyres to enter the European Union not only undermines the credibility of EU legislation, it also increases the risk of consumers being misled and inferior or illegal tyres being passed off as equal to others,” concludes the President of ETRMA.

About ETRMA

The current ETRMA tyre corporate members are: Apollo Vredestein, Bridgestone Europe, Cooper Tires, Continental, Goodyear Dunlop Tires Europe, Hankook, Marangoni, Michelin, Mitas, Nokian Tyres, Pirelli and Trelleborg Wheel Systems. The Technical Rubber Producers are represented through national associations in Belgium (federplast.be), Finland (rmaf), France (snpcp), Germany (wdk), Italy (fgp), the Netherlands (nvr) and Spain (consorcio). The industry provides direct employment for more than 360 000 people in the EU and supports another 800000 jobs in related sectors. ETRMA members’ turnover is estimated at €50b annually, of which upto 5% is invested in R&D.

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Notes to the editor:

What does PAH stand for?

Poly-Aromatic-Hydrocarbons (PAHs): a group of over 100 chemical substances of poly-aromatic structure, that are widely found throughout the environment and formed by both natural and industrial processes. Eight PAHs have been identified as carcinogenic and are regulated by EU legislation.

What are extender oils and why are they used in tyres?

Extender oils used in tyre industry are derived from refining in the petrochemical industry. Their function is to facilitate the processing of the rubber compounds from which tyres are made. Extender oils are also an essential component in the technical performance of the tyre, in particular for its road adherence (or grip) and wear properties, and ensure that tyres wear out more slowly. They therefore contribute directly to the quality of the tyre and ultimately driver safety. Following the precautionary principle of the European Union, the PAH-rich oils were banned. Unfortunately the different types of extender oils are not easily interchangeable, and the switch from high-PAH extender oils to safer, low-PAH oils required significant R&D and also the reformulation of the various rubber mixes in the tyre in order to maintain the crucial adherence and wear properties of the tyre.