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Copper-based biocides are dangerous, says ECHA committee

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Biocides based on copper (II) hydroxide are fatal if inhaled, cause serious eye damage and can be harmful if swallowed

Biocides containing copper flakes should be classified as hazardous for humans, the Committee for Risk Assessment of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has decided.

In a recommendation on the classification and labelling of chemicals used and sold in the European Union (EU), the committee backed proposals from France that these biocides should be regarded as harmful under certain circumstances. Indeed, the committee decided that biocides based on copper (II) hydroxide are fatal if inhaled, cause serious eye damage and can be harmful if swallowed. Also dicopper chloride trihydroxide-based biocides are toxic if swallowed and harmful if inhaled, said the committee.

The committee added that biocides containing copper flakes (coated with aliphatic acid) and basic copper carbonate should be classified as harmful if swallowed; they can also cause severe eye irritation. Copper sulphate pentahydrate biocides are harmful if swallowed and cause serious eye damage; tetracopper hexahydroxide sulphate and its hydrate is harmful if swallowed; Bordeaux mixture (another copper biocide); and copper (I) oxide-based biocides are harmful if inhaled and cause serious eye damage. The committee agreed that copper thiocyanate biocides are very toxic to aquatic life.

Meanwhile, ECHA's biocidal products committee has approved the use of 5-Chloro-2-(4-chlorophenoxy)-phenol (DCPP) as an active substance for biocides used in the EU. DCPP is used to make liquid hand soaps and surface disinfectants.