

INCOPA welcomes the new phosphorus emission limit of the proposed revised Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

The members of the European Inorganic Coagulants Producers Association (INCOPA) welcome the revised Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive proposed by the European Commission on 26 October 2022, particularly with regards to the new proposed phosphorus emission limit and the achievement of energy neutrality.

“Phosphorus is a key resource in agriculture and the food industry among others, and is recognised as a critical raw material¹. We appreciate the proposal to implement a new phosphorus (P) limit of 0.5 mg P/litre from urban wastewaters, although we believe that the Commission could have been even more ambitious both in terms of set limits and timelines for municipal waste water treatment”, commented Jean-Christophe Ades, Chairman of the INCOPA Strategy & Communication Committee.

Nowadays, waste water treatment plants in Finland, Sweden and Denmark already reach levels as low as 0.2-0.3 mg P/litre, by combining existing chemical and biological phosphorus removal processes in the most efficient way.

INCOPA welcomes the fact that tertiary treatment (phosphorus and nitrogen removal) is proposed as mandatory for all large municipal installations treating a load equal to or greater than 100 000 p.e.², whether or not they discharge their treated water in areas sensitive to eutrophication³.

INCOPA believes that the implementation timeline⁴ with regards to tertiary treatment of urban waste water can be reduced since the technologies already exist and are widely deployed.

INCOPA also supports the proposed requirement to achieve energy neutrality at national level for urban waste water treatment facilities above 10 000 p.e. Member States will have to ensure that the total annual renewable energy, notably of biogas from sludge, produced at national level by all urban waste water treatment plants, is equivalent to the total energy used annually.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/critical-raw-materials_en

² p.e.: standard unit to measure pollution. The ‘population equivalent’ (p.e.) describes the average pollution released by one person and per day.

³ Eutrophication: process by which a body of water, or part(s) of it, become progressively contaminated with nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, leading potentially to algal blooms and oxygen depletion.

⁴ Implementation timeline: 31 December 2035 for all waste water treatment plants above 100 000 p.e., and 31 December 2040 for all waste water treatment plants between 10 000 p.e. and 100 000 p.e. discharging in newly established sensitive areas.

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EU Transparency Register: 64879142323-90



INCOPA considers phosphorus recovery as a key topic, and is looking forward to the Delegated Act referred to in Art. 19, that will “supplement this Directive by setting out the minimum reuse and recycling rates for Phosphorus and Nitrogen from sludge”.

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Cefic, the European Chemical Industry Council, founded in 1972, is the voice of large, medium and small chemical companies across Europe, which provide 1.2 million jobs and account for 16% of world chemicals production.

INCOPA, a Cefic Sector Group, is the European Inorganic Coagulants Producers Association and it represents more than 30 producers with more than 80 production sites in Europe, which are responsible for 85% of the European coagulant production capacity.