

INCOPA welcomes the new phosphorus emission limits of the revised Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive voted at the EU Parliament

The members of the European Inorganic Coagulants Producers Association (INCOPA) acknowledge the vote of the European Parliament of 10th April 2024 on the revised Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, towards the more ambitious phosphorus emission limits and the energy neutrality objective.

INCOPA welcomes the fact that tertiary treatment (phosphorus and nitrogen removal) will become mandatory for urban wastewater treatment plants treating a load of 150 000 p.e.¹ and above, whether they discharge their treated water in areas sensitive to eutrophication² or not.

We also appreciate the more ambitious phosphorus (P) limits of 0.5 mg P/litre for large urban wastewater treatment plants and 0.7 mg P/litre for medium-sized ones.

“Since the 1960s, inorganic coagulants have been used effectively in combination with advanced biological treatment processes to remove phosphorus from urban wastewater and therefore prevent the eutrophication process in surface natural waters. Achieving the new limits, simply implies adjustments in quantities with very little or no investment costs” says Jean-Christophe Ades, Chairman of the INCOPA Strategy & Communication Committee.

¹ p.e.: standard unit to measure pollution. The ‘population equivalent’ (p.e.) describes the average pollution released by one person and per day.

² Eutrophication: process by which a body of water, or part(s) of it, becomes progressively contaminated with nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, leading potentially to algal blooms and oxygen depletion.

INCOPA is of the opinion that the implementation timeline³ with regards to tertiary treatment can be reduced significantly since the technologies already exist and are widely deployed.

INCOPA also supports the requirement to achieve energy neutrality at national level for urban wastewater treatment facilities above 10 000 p.e. Here as well, inorganic coagulants play a pivotal role by safeguarding the energy potential of sewage sludge to produce more biogas.


Furthermore, inorganic coagulants are largely obtained from the recycling⁴ of co-products and secondary raw materials generated by several industries. Accordingly, in line with the ambitions of the EU Green Deal, they have a low carbon footprint⁵.

With decades of experience, INCOPA's members are ready to support and accompany the water industry to implement the new Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive as quickly as possible when it comes to the new phosphorus limits as well as the energy neutrality objective.

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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 14% 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.

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³ Implementation timeline: 31 December 2039 for all wastewater treatment plants above 150 000 p.e., and 31 December 2045 for all wastewater treatment plants between 10 000 p.e. and 150 000 p.e. discharging in newly established sensitive areas.

⁴ See INCOPA Circular Economy infographics on iron-based and aluminium-based coagulants: <https://www.incopa.org/news/incopa-circular-economy-infographics/>

⁵ See IVL LCA study on inorganic coagulants: <https://www.incopa.org/news/incopa-publishes-an-updated-lca-study-with-ivl/>