docs for chemicals
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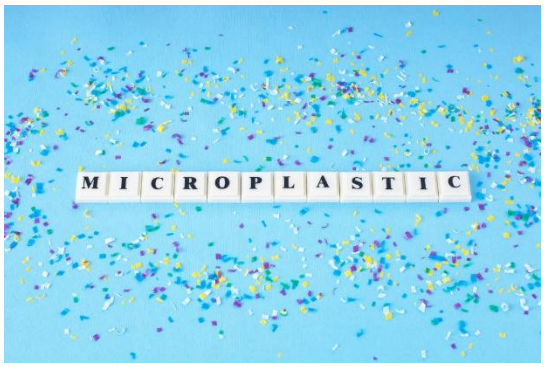
Restrictions on Microplastics in Switzerland

The EU enacted restrictions on the manufacture and distribution of microplastics as early as 2023. Entry 78 in Annex XVII of the REACH Regulation established a broad ban on synthetic polymer microparticles.

Switzerland followed suit and amended Annex 2.9 of the Chemical Risk Reduction Ordinance (ORRChem) in the fall of 2025. Some requirements have been in effect since April 2026, while others have longer transition periods.



Plastics are useful in many ways, but microplastics have increasingly become an environmental problem (stock image)

Hardly any other material has enjoyed such a meteoric rise over the past fifty years as plastic. These synthetically produced giant molecules, in countless types, variants, colors, and shapes, have shaped modern life.

A downside of this success is that small and microscopic plastic particles—microplastics—can be found virtually everywhere in the environment and even in the human body. By far the largest portion of this spread is unintended and occurs when the "ravages of time" take their toll on objects made of compact plastic or on polymer coatings. Whether it is tire wear, carelessly discarded plastic bags ("littering"), or the gradual deterioration of paint and varnish layers on buildings, small and microscopic particles are constantly being released and entering the environment. There is currently no real way to address this so-called secondary microplastic pollution.

In contrast, the release of small polymer particles that are intentionally added to certain products (so-called primary microplastics) can be controlled. Primary microplastics in cosmetics and toys, in lubricants and fertilizers, and in numerous other products are not strictly necessary, and in some cases, manufacturers had already discontinued such uses prior to the EU microplastics regulation.

Similarities and Differences Between EU and Swiss Regulations

Only primary microplastics are regulated

Both the current regulations in the EU and in Switzerland cover only polymer particles as such, or when they are contained in preparations (mixtures) to impart a desired property to them.

Terminology

The EU uses the term “microplastics” only once in Entry 78 of Annex XVII of the REACH Regulation, specifically in relation to labeling requirements. Otherwise, “microplastics” was removed as a technical term and replaced with the cumbersome phrase “synthetic polymer microparticles” (SPM). In the Swiss legal text of the ORRChem, however, the descriptive term “microplastics” has been largely retained.

Restrictions, Scope, and Exemptions Largely Harmonized

Through Annex 2.9, paragraphs 1 and 7, of the Chemical Risk Reduction Ordinance (ORRChem, SR 814.81), the restrictions on microplastics or SPMs adopted by the EU are incorporated into Swiss chemicals law with virtually no substantive changes. Thus, the scope of the regulations is the same as that provided for in the EU directive, as are the exceptions to the bans and the phased implementation of the bans for the various product categories concerned.

Labeling and Information Requirements in the Supply Chain

Entry 78 in Annex XVII establishes information requirements for certain SPMs supplied to industrial, commercial, and private users (right column, paras. 7 and 8). These requirements concern guidance on how to minimize release into the environment. The EU standard also includes a specific, time-limited labeling requirement for lip products and makeup products, stating: “This product contains microplastics.” (right column, para. 9) These requirements do not apply in Switzerland.

Obligation to Provide Information to Authorities

In the EU, manufacturers and users of SPMs are required to submit comprehensive annual reports to ECHA detailing the use, identity, and quantities of SPMs released into the environment (entry 78, right column, paragraphs 11 and 12). In Switzerland, there is no analogous reporting requirement for microplastics. However, information must be made available to authorities when exemptions from the ban are utilized.

Exemptions for Products Intended for Research Purposes

While Switzerland provides an exemption from the microplastics ban for products intended for research purposes, the EU regulation lacks a corresponding provision.[1]

[1] However, the EU is considering clarifying the legal text. See the European Commission’s Guidance Document: REACH Restriction on Synthetic Polymer Microparticles, Version 1.1 (2025), page 48

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EU Commission Guideline as the Basis for Enforcement in Switzerland

The explanatory report by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), which was prepared in advance of the microplastics ban, noted: “The federal authorities will instruct the cantonal agencies to also carry out enforcement in accordance with the provisions of a … guideline [from the European Commission].”

For any questions regarding interpretation or areas of uncertainty raised by affected companies in Switzerland, the guidance published by the European Commission in March 2025 (see footnote 1 above) should therefore be consulted first.

About Us

I+K AG has been advising Swiss SMEs and large companies on technical chemical and environmental safety issues for over 30 years. With our IT solutions, we develop efficient and functional tools for hazardous substance management and trade compliance. Our SaaS application SAFIN is an intelligent web-based solution for hazardous substance classifications as well as for the creation of safety data sheets, chemical labels, and operating instructions, which is continuously adapted to current chemical legislation and regulatory developments.

With our services, we advise and support our clients in all matters relating to safety data sheets, labelling of chemicals, product notifications according to the Swiss ChemO (RPC notifications) as well as according to Annex VIII to the CLP Regulation (Poison Centre Notifications, PCN).

Our C^3 ChemComplianceCheck is a preventive assessment of operational chemical safety. In line with the motto “act instead of react,” weak points are identified before official orders are issued or damage occurs.

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