

The revision of the drinking water directive: An opportunity to strengthen the European manufacturers of rubber goods in contact with drinking water.

Elastomer materials are used in Drinking Water applications worldwide for more than 100 years. Elastomers are present in drinking water infrastructures such as pipelines conveying potable water, seals, gaskets, joints, hoses and lining for water containers. Given the variety of applications, hundreds of substances are used in elastomer products in contact with drinking water.

The Drinking Water directive encourages member states of the European Union to guarantee that water quality meets certain criteria. During the implementation process - ongoing for more than 20 years - each member state developed its own compliance system for drinking water products. As a result, the provision for safety requirements and related tests to be performed to elastomer products in contact with drinking water differs. It remains a challenge for the industry to comply with many different systems. The current situation hampers the establishment of a truly single market for drinking water products, putting at stake the industry's ability, in its vast majority SMEs, to grow and cope with worldwide competition.

Today the European Parliament approved the revision of the drinking water directive that is expected to enter into force before the end of the year. The new Article 11 of the revised directive describes a comprehensive framework for products in contact with drinking water. It includes, among others, provisions for developing a European positive list of substances for groups of materials, including organic materials such as rubber. It will also regulate the procedures and methods for testing and accepting final materials and commit to develop European standards for uniform testing of the products in contact with drinking water.

As established in the proposal, four years after approval, a positive list of substances for materials in contact with drinking water will be developed for organic materials. ETRMA extremely welcomes the creation of a positive list, as it will secure that high standards for human health and the environment are equally set across all European member states. It will also add trust and enforce the EU single market for rubber goods.

The new provisions of article 11 will also develop a framework for testing procedures and methods. This is important for rubber goods. Compliance requirements have to bear in mind the size and the performance required to products. Small O-rings and gaskets' use and performance differs from lining for water compartments. Tests and compliance requirements should recognise products' specificities.

The next years are decisive for setting a trustable and feasible framework for drinking water products. ETRMA wishes to share its knowledge and expertise over this process and help establishing the next regulatory framework for products in contact with drinking water.