

EN 717-1 to remain the reference method for measuring formaldehyde

EPF plans to introduce voluntary emission class for formaldehyde

The European Panel Federation (EPF), headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, has now also fleshed out its position in the face of growing discussions about lowering formaldehyde emissions from wood-based panels over the past few months.

The federation is still calling for emission class E1 to be binding throughout Europe. Emission class E2, which remains permitted in a few countries is to be eliminated once and for all. The EPF had outlined these goals in its Compulsory E1 initiative, which was launched back in 2015. Alongside class E1, which stipulates an underlying limit value of 0.1 ppm or 0.124 mg/m³, the EPF also intends to introduce a voluntary class (E1/2) with a limit of 0.05 ppm or 0.062 mg/m³. This limit is to apply to all types of wood-based panels. Laminated board must use a substrate that is at least E1 to comply with rules contained in the additional E1/2 class. Moreover, the testing chamber method described in EN 717-1 should still be used to measure formaldehyde emissions.

The technical aspects of the additional E1/2 class put forward by the EPF had been developed during the second half of 2018. Additional requirements were formulated in subsequent months with the involvement of different EPF bodies, including the Formaldehyde/VOC task force. At its quarterly meeting on 2 April, the EPF Managing Board merged the technical aspects for class E1/2 that were adopted back in November with these requirements to create a position that was approved at its general meeting on 3 April without any opposing votes. The EPF's position was first communicated externally in a statement published on 7 May.

In this statement, the EPF renewed its call for European harmonisation of formaldehyde rules. This harmonisation should ensure uniform rules throughout Europe.



(Photo credit: EUWID)

A change in the measuring methodology for formaldehyde emissions from wood-based panels slated to take effect in Germany on 1 January 2020, which would in effect halve the E1 limit contained in the German Banned Chemicals Ordinance (ChemVerbotsVO) from 0.1 ppm to 0.05 ppm, is described by the EPF as one country going it alone. This approach created special rules for Germany, thus contravening the goals of the EU Internal Market. In this vein, the EPF also made reference to a judgement issued by the Court of the European Union on 10 April 2019, which described supplementary national requirements for products governed by harmonised European standards as not allowed in a case looking at standards for wooden flooring and sports flooring.

Other associations have adopted a similar position. They include the German wood-based panel federation VHI (Berlin), the European Furniture Industries Confederation (EFIC, Brussels) and the German wood industry association HDH (Bad Honnef, Germany). All four associations are critical

of the variations within the EU caused by Germany changing its measuring methodology and call for uniform rules throughout Europe. To this end, the possibility of introducing a new harmonised emission class for formaldehyde should be reviewed in consultation with the European Commission. However, a clear line has not yet emerged in terms of the exact process. In an internal position paper drawn up in mid-March, the EFIC and the HDH advocated the mandatory introduction of an emission class below E1 that would be valid throughout Europe. In this vein, they raised the possibility of the new E1/2 emission class with a limit of 0.05 ppm, determined in accordance with EN 717-1. The EPF and VHI tend to support voluntary rules. These two wood-based panel associations feel that the mandatory introduction of a new emission class would take a relatively long time because of the required CEN standardisation process, mentioning a timeframe of at least two to three years. By contrast, an additional voluntary class might be established on the market much more quickly in the view of the EPF. □