

Essential oils are already defined as chemical substances, and regulated as such by both the REACH and the Regulation on hazard classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals (CLP). In the foreseen revisions, the Commission has no plans to alter this definition, nor to start requiring an analysis of each molecule in essential oils.

If an essential oil manufacturer has knowledge about a toxic constituent in the oil, that toxicity must be taken into account in the assessment of the toxicity of the oil itself. That principle already applies by virtue of the CLP Regulation, and the Commission envisages to clarify it in the upcoming revision.

The REACH revision does not include any plan to ban essential oils, like lavender oils. However, some Member States with the support of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) are currently assessing the possibility of developing a dossier to restrict skin sensitisers in consumer products under the current version of REACH. If a dossier is developed it will be submitted to ECHA for a scientific assessment and a socio-economic assessment during which a risk and cost benefit analysis will be done. On the basis of this scientific assessment, the Commission may decide to develop a legal text to restrict skin sensitisers and submit it to Member States in view of a final decision based on a Member State vote by qualified majority. As most of the essential oils are classified as skin sensitiser, such a restriction, if any, could affect the use of essential oils in consumer products. The Commission has taken no decision so far on the initiative proposed by some Member States.

More information on the current legislation and possible revisions:

The EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability is the first step towards a zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment announced in the European Green Deal. The Strategy will boost innovation for safe and sustainable chemicals, and increase protection of human health and the environment against hazardous chemicals.

To achieve this purpose, the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability (CSS) announces proposals to reinforce the EU's chemical legislation. In this context, the Commission is working on the revisions of the REACH Regulation and the Regulation on hazard classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals (CLP), to reinforce them as the EU's cornerstones for regulating chemicals and to be complemented by coherent approaches to assess and manage chemicals in existing sectorial legislation, especially that regulating consumer products. According to the Strategy, a revision of the CLP is foreseen by 2021 and a revision of REACH by 2022.

Before adopting new proposals, the Commission consults experts, stakeholders and carries inter-service consultation to identify the most appropriate instruments and approaches, all to ensure the highest possible protection of consumers and the environment while taking account of socio-economic implications. Once adopted by the Commission, the proposals will then need to be agreed with the European Parliament and the Council.

The revision of the CLP foresees the introduction of new hazard classes (such as endocrine disruptors as well as persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic) and corresponding classification criteria. If this will be the case, essential oils could potentially be classified under those new categories if they meet the newly set classification criteria and be subjected to the 'generic risk management approach'. However, in any case, this will not mean a ban on essential oils.

The CLP revision is still ongoing and we do not prejudge the content of the final proposal. The Commission is currently about to launch a public consultation to gather the views of citizens, institutions and organisations from the public and private sectors on how to best revise the CLP Regulation taking into account scientific and technical progress.

The Chemical Strategy for Sustainability presents several actions for a toxic-free environment and to protect people and the environment from hazardous chemicals. The Commission will in particular consider extending the 'generic approach to risk management', i.e. restricting certain substances in products for certain uses while allowing limited exemptions under conditions clearly defined in law.

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