

Bioplastics successfully meet all EU safety standards

Products made from bio-based plastics must undergo the same testing procedures as conventional plastic products to access the market of the European Union (EU). Thereby a health risk for consumers is excluded. Plastics intended to be certified as biodegradable or compostable must undergo additional tests. "Products made of bioplastics thus pass even more tests than conventional plastic products," explains Hasso von Pogrell, Managing Director of European Bioplastics (EUBP).

In the EU, plastic products with food contact have to comply with strict regulations. These have to be met by bio-based as well as by conventional plastics. The relevant Commission Regulation, (EU) No. 10/2011, contains requirements for migration tests. A migration limit value indicates the maximum permitted quantity of an ingredient to transit into food. The limit value ensures that food contact material does not pose a health risk to consumers. In addition to the migration test, the composition of multi-component materials is checked. Only those substances and materials that have been assessed and listed in an EU overview as safe may be used in their manufacture.

Biodegradable plastics certified for industrial composting according to EU standard EN 13432 have to meet a fixed limit for heavy metals and other toxic and hazardous substances. Also, an ecotoxicity test is carried out in accordance with the OECD rules. This test examines possible effects of industrial compost on plant growth and its toxicological harmlessness to microorganisms. Agricultural mulch films certified as biodegradable in soil according to EU standard EN 17033 must comply with strict SVHC guidelines. This ensures that the films do not contain substances of very high concern. In addition to a further test for nitrification inhibition, EN 17033 certification also includes a procedure to exclude negative effects on soil organisms such as earthworms. A standard for the home composting of carrier bags (prEN 17427) expected to be published soon by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) will summarize all test procedures once again. "Products made of bioplastics thus undergo even more test procedures than conventional plastic products," summarizes von Pogrell.

"The claim that products made from bio-based plastics contain harmful chemicals is untenable because of the numerous tests that are required", criticizes von Pogrell. The EUBP Managing Director refers to the findings of a study recently published by a research group from the University of Frankfurt. The methodology of the study, in which bioplastics products were subjected to migration testing, is highly questionable as it differs significantly from the methodology of EU testing procedures. "Besides, the test result of the Frankfurt study does not represent a specific characteristic of bioplastics. On the contrary, the different methodology leads to the same result when testing conventional plastic products," explains von Pogrell.

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