



CEPE guidance: communication on sensitising biocides for Artists' Colours

Many products used by consumers require in-can preservation against bacteria, yeasts and fungi. A number of these biocides and other preservatives are also used in water-based paints, printing inks and artists' colours. There has been considerable media interest in the use of methyl isothiazolinone (MIT) following high increases in the numbers of allergic reactions reported by clinics in several countries. Whilst the use of MIT in cosmetics may be the principal cause of skin sensitisation, the presence of MIT in paints and other products could be sufficient to cause an allergic response in already sensitised individuals.

The use of MIT in cosmetics is being reviewed, and much lower limits and/or restrictions in certain types of products are expected. This should reduce the numbers of new cases of sensitisation, but there will still be a significant population already sensitised to MIT. One of the criticisms of the paint industry has been that the presence of MIT in consumer paints is not mentioned. The levels currently used are below the legal requirements for labelling, yet still high enough to be of concern for affected individuals. As a consequence, and also in order to avert possible future restrictions or legislative controls, CEPE has issued guidance on labelling of decorative paints to inform consumers about the presence of skin sensitising biocides.

Voluntary labelling is not a viable option for artists' colours, since the small package sizes typically used do not permit space on the label for additional statements. Nonetheless CEPE is committed to ensuring safe use of its members' products and recognizes that manufacturers of artists' colours may also receive queries about sensitising biocides. The Artists' Colours Technical Committee and Sector Group have therefore agreed to communicate an appropriate warning via their company websites or other documentation. The following standard text is recommended for this communication:

If untreated, water-based products provide an environment for growth of micro-organisms which can both impair the product and cause adverse health effects. Water-based artists' materials therefore contain biocides as preservatives, including (but not exclusively) those from the family of chemicals known as izothiazolinones. Biocides can cause allergic skin reactions in individuals who are already sensitized to them, even at levels below current legal thresholds for warnings on the label. People who know they suffer from such allergies should exercise care and take suitable precautions when handling any water-based art material or other product.

May 2015