



---

**COSMETICS EUROPE:**  
**N° 2: ALKYLPHENOL ETHOXYLATES**

DECEMBER 1995

---

**COLIPA RECOMMENDATION N° 2**

**ON**

**ALKYLPHENOL ETHOXYLATES**

Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs) are non-ionic surfactants made by ethoxylation of alkylphenols, particularly octylphenol and nonylphenol. They were among the first commercially available surfactants, introduced in the 1940s. They are used by several industry sectors, such as textiles, paints and agrochemicals.

In the cosmetic industry, octyl- and nonylphenol ethoxylates can be used in a wide range of products (e.g. hair products such as hair dyes or shampoos, decorative products such as mascara or eye liners, etc.) as surfactants and as solubilising and emulsifying agents. The quantities of APEs used by the cosmetic industry are, however, very small compared to the amounts used in other industrial fields.

Although APEs meet the requirements of the EU Directive on the biodegradability of non-ionic surfactants and detergents, studies have shown that the primary biodegradability of APEs may drop under certain conditions. It is the biodegradation products of these compounds that are now receiving the most attention and these surfactants may be subject to adverse publicity.

Some laboratory studies have suggested that APEs may have some oestrogenic activity.

However, given the low reported environmental concentrations and bioconcentration factors for APEs, potential for these compounds to achieve biologically effective concentrations in the environment appears to be low.

**Recommendation:**

Colipa advises its member associations and its member companies to consider the possible adverse publicity surrounding the APEs, during their reviews of formulations.

COSMETICS EUROPE IS THE EUROPEAN TRADE  
ASSOCIATION REPRESENTING THE INTEREST OF THE  
COSMETICS, TOILETRY AND PERFUMERY INDUSTRY

COSMETICS EUROPE – THE PERSONAL CARE ASSOCIATION  
AVENUE HERRMANN-DEBROUX 40, 1160 BRUSSELS  
T. +32 2 227 66 10, F. +32 2 227 66 27  
[WWW.COSMETICSEUROPE.EU](http://WWW.COSMETICSEUROPE.EU)