

# Microplastic pollution from plastic pellet losses

During its April II session, Parliament is expected to adopt its first-reading position on a proposal aimed at preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution. The Council has yet to agree its position.

## Background

Microplastics are plastic particles typically smaller than 5 mm. Once dispersed within the environment, they are extremely difficult to remove and very persistent. Microplastics may present a hazard because of their physical form, as vectors of chemicals and as vectors of pathogens. Today, they are present in the air, soil, freshwater, seas, oceans, plants and animals, and in several components of the human diet. Human exposure to microplastics is therefore widespread, raising concerns about potential health impacts. The EU has committed to addressing microplastic pollution in its action plans on the new circular economy and zero pollution, both of which are part of the European Green Deal. Losses of plastic pellets (the base material for manufacturing plastic products) are the third largest source of unintentional microplastic releases in the EU environment, and there is currently no legal instrument at EU level specifically targeting this issue.

## European Commission proposal

The regulation, proposed on 16 October 2023, would impose obligations for the handling of plastic pellets at all stages of the supply chain to prevent losses. It would apply to all economic operators handling plastic pellets in the EU in quantities above 5 tonnes per year, and to EU carriers and non-EU carriers transporting plastic pellets inside the EU. The text covers transport by road, rail and inland waterways, but not by sea. To demonstrate compliance with the regulation's requirements, medium and large-sized enterprises operating installations handling above 1 000 tonnes of pellets annually would need to obtain mandatory third-party certification. Micro- and small enterprises, as well as operators handling less than 1 000 tonnes of pellets per year, would be required to provide self-declarations of conformity.

## European Parliament position

The report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), adopted on 19 March 2024 with 71 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 1 abstention, would extend the definition of plastic pellets to cover powders, cylinders, beads and flakes. It would bring the transport of plastic pellets, regardless of mode, within the regulation's scope, and propose additional measures for maritime and inland waterway transport. Risk assessment plans to be developed by economic operators would have to contain additional information: on the number of tonnes of plastic pellets handled per year, and the chemical nature of each polymer contained in plastic pellets on site. Economic operators would be required to label all storage and transport containers holding plastic pellets with a specific pictogram and indications on their hazardousness and the need to avoid release, collect any spillage and ensure proper end-of-life management. Training requirements would be strengthened. The report would introduce a specific form for loss tracking, to be completed after each incident and communicated to the competent authorities. Within 2 years of the regulation's entry into force, the Commission would be required to publish a report on the feasibility of introducing chemical traceability of plastic pellets. The regulation would be reviewed 8 years after its entry into force to assess its application and effectiveness.

First-reading report: [2023/0373\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: João Albuquerque (S&D, Portugal). For further information, see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).



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