

Reducing microplastic pollution from plastic pellet losses

OVERVIEW

Once dispersed in the environment, microplastic particles under 5 mm in size are extremely difficult to remove and very persistent. 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 microplastic particles is therefore widespread, raising concerns about potential health impacts.

The EU has committed to addressing microplastic pollution in two action plans – on the new circular economy and on zero pollution for air, water and soil – both of which are part of the European Green Deal. On 16 October 2023, the European Commission proposed a regulation to tackle microplastic pollution resulting from losses of plastic pellets – the industrial raw materials used to make plastic products. These losses are the third largest source of unintentional microplastic releases into the EU environment. The proposal would apply to all economic operators handling plastic pellets in the EU in quantities above 5 tonnes per year, as well as to EU and non-EU carriers transporting plastic pellets within the EU. It would set requirements for best handling practices, mandatory certification and self-declaration, and provide for the development of a harmonised methodology to estimate losses.

Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), responsible for the file, adopted its legislative report on 19 March 2024. The text awaits a vote during the second April 2024 plenary session, with a view to establishing Parliament's position at first reading.

Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution		
<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)	COM(2023) 645 16.10.2023
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	João Albuquerque (S&D, Portugal)	2023/0373(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Catherine Chabaud (Renew Europe, France) Ska Keller (Greens/EFA, Germany) Karol Karski (ECR, Poland) Idoia Villanueva Ruiz (The Left, Spain)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Plenary vote on the committee report	



Introduction

Microplastics commonly refer to plastic particles [below 5 mm](#) in size. They can be grouped into two broad categories, primary and secondary microplastics, based on the formation processes involved. Primary microplastics are [directly released](#) into the environment as plastic particles. They are either intentionally manufactured and added to products (such as artificial turf covering sports pitches, fertilisers, cleaning and laundry products, or cosmetics) or originate from leakages of pre-production pellets; wear and tear of plastic products during use (e.g. abrasion of tyres); peeling and flaking of paints and coatings; or washing or wearing of synthetic textiles. Secondary microplastics, by contrast, are produced from the physical breakdown of larger plastic items in the environment (e.g. under the [action](#) of solar UV radiation, wind, currents and other natural factors). Fragmentation and weathering [may continue](#) until the nanoscale (below 1 µm).

Microplastics come in a [wide range](#) of sizes and shapes (such as spheres, fibres and fragments) and have a [complex composition](#) that includes polymeric materials and mixtures of chemicals (chemicals present in the plastic, such as additives or other substances; and environmental organic contaminants that [adsorb/absorb](#) to the plastic particles in the environment). Once dispersed in the environment, microplastic particles are nearly impossible to remove and persist for a long time, as they do not biodegrade. Their small size makes them [readily available](#) for ingestion by wildlife¹ and potentially liable to transfer within food chains. Today, microplastics are [present](#) in the air, soil and sediment, freshwater, seas and [oceans](#), plants and animals, and in [several components](#) of the [human diet](#), such as fish and seafood, salt, sugar, honey, rice, drinking [water](#), milk and other [beverages](#). Therefore, they can be considered [globally pervasive pollutants](#). Due to the [growing use of plastics](#), their concentrations in the environment are forecast [to increase](#).

Microplastics may present a hazard because of their physical form; as vectors of chemicals; and as vectors of pathogens (microorganisms in biofilms),² and these factors may be combined. While human exposure to microplastic particles is widespread, the available evidence is insufficient to determine the risks to human health,³ and scientists agree on the need for further research.

The EU has committed to addressing microplastic pollution in the new [circular economy action plan](#) and the [zero pollution action plan for air, water and soil](#), both of which are part of the European Green Deal. One of the key targets of the zero pollution plan is reducing microplastics released into the environment by 30 % by 2030. In September 2023, a [restriction on microplastics intentionally added to products](#) was adopted under the [EU chemicals legislation REACH](#) (by means of a delegated act). On 16 October 2023, the Commission proposed a [regulation](#) to tackle microplastic pollution resulting from losses of plastic pellets (the industrial raw materials used to make plastic products) along the entire pellet supply chain in the EU. The Commission [expects](#) that the proposed regulation and the REACH restriction will jointly contribute to over one fourth of the effort required to achieve the EU's 30 % reduction target by 2030.

Existing situation

Legislative framework

The EU has taken a number of regulatory measures to tackle macroplastic pollution, notably through the 2019 [Single Use Plastics Directive](#), the [Waste Framework Directive](#), the recently revised [Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive](#), and the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#). At the international level, the EU is involved in the [High ambition coalition to end plastic pollution](#), which pushes for an ambitious '[global plastics treaty](#)' to end plastic pollution by 2040. As mandated by the United Nations Environment Assembly in March 2022, negotiations are currently underway for such a [legally binding instrument](#) on plastic pollution, which would cover the entire life cycle of plastic.

To reduce microplastic pollution, the Commission adopted on 25 September 2023 [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2023/2055](#) restricting synthetic polymer microparticles whether used on their own

or intentionally added to mixtures (i.e. prohibiting their placement on the market). This regulation started applying on 17 October 2023. The restriction covers particles smaller than 5 mm that are organic, insoluble and resistant to degradation, and are present in a range of products such as glitter; facial scrubs and other types of cosmetics; detergents, waxes, polishes and air fresheners; certain fertilisers, plant protection products and biocides; certain medical devices; and the granular infill for use in synthetic sports surfaces (such as rubber substrate for artificial turf sports surfaces). The regulation includes specific [transitional periods](#) and [exceptions](#) for selected product groups. The [European Chemicals Agency](#) estimates that around 42 000 tonnes of microplastics end up in the environment each year because of the use of products to which they are added on purpose.

The Commission has identified six main sources of unintentional microplastic releases, accounting for 90 % to 93 % of all emissions to the EU environment (see Table 1). Plastic pellet losses rank third, with a 7-10 % share of the total. At the EU level, there is still no instrument specifically aimed at preventing and reducing pollution from pellet losses. For the other identified sources, the Commission [impact assessment](#) accompanying the proposal suggests that measures either have been proposed or could be considered under other policy instruments. For instance, microplastic emissions from tyre abrasion are addressed in the [new Euro 7 Regulation](#), while requirements for paints or synthetic textiles could be introduced under the [Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation](#), once current knowledge gaps are closed.

Table 1 – Unintentional microplastic releases in the EU

Source	Estimated quantity (tonnes/year), 2019
Paints	231 000 – 863 000
Tyres	360 000 – 540 000
Pellets	52 140 – 184 290
Textiles	1 649 – 61 078
Geotextiles	6 000 – 19 750
Detergent capsules	4 140 – 5 980
Total of 6 sources	654 929 – 1 674 098 (90-93 % of total emissions)*

(*) Estimated total of all sources: 729 087 – 1 808 198.

Source: Commission [impact assessment](#), p. 8.

Plastic pellet value chain and loss pathways

Plastic industrial raw materials come in various forms, including pellets, flakes, powders, and liquid. In Europe, pellets make up around [80 %](#) of all plastic industrial raw materials produced. Plastic pellets typically have a diameter of 2–5 mm and are regular in shape. Technically, they are defined as 'small masses of preformed moulding material, having relatively uniform dimensions in a given lot, often used as feedstock in moulding and extrusion operations' ([ISO 472:2013](#)).

Several operators are involved in pellet handling across the value chain. Virgin pellets are manufactured at large installations, then packaged for storage or transportation to plastic converters, where final plastic products are made, or to other customers, e.g. via logistics hubs. The main types of packaging used include 25 kg bags stacked on pallets, octabins (large carton boxes), 'big bags' (large plastic bags), containers or silos. Transportation is done by road, rail, air and sea. In recycling facilities, plastic waste is processed into recycled plastic flakes or pellets, to be reintroduced into the plastics manufacturing cycle. In the EU, close to [100 large](#) polymer-producing companies account for 90 % of the total EU production of virgin pellets. They produce some 54.8 million tonnes of pellets annually. By contrast, 66 % of processors/converters are micro-companies, while transporters and other logistics operators are mainly micro and small enterprises. Half of the 730 plastic recycling companies in the EU are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Pellet losses can occur at various stages along the value chain: production (of virgin or recycled pellets), processing, distribution, storage and tank cleaning, waste management, etc. Losses can result from chronic, ongoing incidents during routine operations (with pellet loading and unloading presenting the [highest risk of loss](#) at all stages), or from acute, one-off incidents, such as accidents during transport or major equipment failures. Pellets lost at production, processing and recycling installations either end up in industrial or urban wastewater treatment facilities, where most are captured in sludge, or enter the environment directly. Pellets lost during logistic or shipping operations often enter the environment directly. Like all microplastics, pellets are [readily transported](#) from one geographical location to another. They are extremely mobile and can be dispersed by land surface waters, ocean currents, and through the air.

Under the [Operation Clean Sweep \(OCS\) Programme](#), an international, voluntary and free initiative implemented in Europe since 2015, the industry has developed the [OCS Europe certification scheme](#) to control and document the compliance of companies across the plastics supply chain with requirements on the prevention of plastic pellets, powders and flakes loss to the environment.

At the international level, parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic ([OSPAR Convention](#)) adopted in 2021 a non-binding [recommendation](#) on the reduction of plastic pellet loss into the marine environment. In March 2024, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)'s Marine Environment Protection Committee approved [recommendations](#) for the carriage of plastic pellets by sea in freight containers. IMO Members States are [currently working](#) on [draft guidelines](#) for the clean-up of plastic pellets from ship-source spills.

Parliament's starting position

In its [2021 resolution](#) on the new circular economy action plan, the Parliament urged the Commission to adopt a general phase-out of intentionally added microplastics and to reduce, through new mandatory regulatory measures, the unintentional release of all microplastics at the source (for example, from tyres, textiles, artificial turf and during the production of plastic pellets).

In the [resolution](#) adopted that same year on the impact on fisheries of marine litter, the Parliament called on the Commission to tackle the problem of the loss and spread of microplastics, such as plastic pellets, in the environment throughout the supply chain, especially during land and sea transport, as well as to tackle the associated risks of spillage.

On 18 January 2024, Parliament held [a debate](#) on plastic pellet spills, following an ecological disaster on the Spanish coast caused by the loss of a container loaded with plastic pellet sacks at sea.

Council starting position

In its 2020 [conclusions](#) on Making the recovery circular and green, the Council supported the Commission in restricting intentionally added microplastics as soon as possible and tackling pollution from plastic pellets to protect both the environment and human health.

Preparation of the proposal

The proposal is based on an [impact assessment](#) (IA). A literature review and stakeholder input (to the [inception impact assessment](#), [public consultation](#) and targeted SME survey), served as the basis for the four policy options considered in the IA. The preferred policy option combines option 1 (mandatory standardised methodology to measure pellet losses) with sub-option 2b (mandatory requirements in a new EU law with lighter requirements for micro- and small companies). EPRS issued an [initial appraisal](#) of the Commission IA in January 2024, analysing its strengths and weaknesses in detail.

The changes the proposal would bring

Scope

The [proposed regulation](#) would establish obligations for pellet handling at all stages of the supply chain to prevent losses (production, master batching and compounding, conversion, waste management, recycling, distribution, repacking, transport, storage and tank cleaning). According to the Commission, these requirements are based on the industry's OCS programme and the OSPAR recommendation. The proposed regulation would apply to all economic operators involved in handling plastic pellets in the EU in quantities above 5 tonnes per year, as well as EU and non-EU carriers transporting plastic pellets in the EU. The proposed text covers transport by road, rail and inland waterways, excluding maritime transport. Under the proposal, a pellet is defined as 'a small mass of preformed polymer-containing moulding material, having relatively uniform dimensions in a given lot, that is used as feedstock in plastic product manufacturing operations'.

Obligations for companies

From the date of the regulation's entry into force, economic operators, EU and non-EU carriers would be obliged to ensure that pellet losses are avoided, and to take immediate action to clean up such losses where they occur. They would have to perform action in the following priority order: 1) prevention to avoid spills of pellets from primary containment during routine handling; 2) containment of spilled pellets to make sure they do not become a loss to the environment; and 3) clean-up after a spill or loss event.

Economic operators would be required to draw up, implement and keep up-to-date risk assessment plans for their installations, taking into consideration the installation size and the scale of operations, and notify them to national competent authorities, together with a self-declaration of conformity. Risk assessment plans should comply with Annex I and describe in particular the specific equipment and procedures in place to prevent, contain and clean up spills and losses. Economic operators would be required to consider at least the equipment and procedures listed in Annex I. **Both EU and non-EU carriers** would have to implement the actions listed in Annex III for loading and unloading, transport, cleaning and maintenance operations.

Economic operators and EU carriers would need to train their staff accordingly. They would be required to keep records of actions taken to implement the regulation's requirements, as well as records of annually estimated quantities of losses⁴ and the total volume of plastic pellets handled. These records should be retained for 5 years and provided to competent authorities or certifiers on demand. The Commission would request European standardisation organisations to establish a standard for estimating quantities of pellets lost to the environment. If no organisation accepts the request to draft a harmonised standard or if the Commission deems the proposed standard unsatisfactory, it should set the methodology by means of an implementing act.

Medium and large-sized companies that operate installations handling **over 1 000 tonnes** of pellets per year would have additional obligations. These include carrying out an annual internal assessment on the state of compliance of the installation with the requirements of the risk assessment plan, adopting an awareness and training programme addressing specific training needs and modalities, and demonstrating compliance with the regulation by obtaining, and renewing, a **certificate of conformity** issued by certifiers (i.e. independent third parties). These certifiers could be an accredited conformity assessment body or an environmental verifier licensed to carry out verification and validation in accordance with the [EMAS Regulation](#). Certifiers should not have any conflicts of interest and should have the necessary expertise, equipment and infrastructure. When assessing conformity, certifiers should use **spot-checks**. EMAS-registered operators would be deemed compliant and thus exempted from the obligation of obtaining a certificate and notifying the renewals of their risk assessment plans and self-declaration of conformity if an environmental verifier has checked that the requirements set in Annex I have been

included in the operator's environmental management system and implemented. Medium-sized enterprises would benefit from a longer transitional period than large-sized ones before first certification (3 years from entry into force, compared to 2) and a longer validity of the certificate (4 years instead of 3). **Micro- and small-sized enterprises**, as well as medium and large-sized enterprises operating installations handling **below 1 000 tonnes** of pellets per year, would have to notify updates of their risk assessment plans and renewals of their self-declarations of conformity every 5 years.

Competent authorities would be required to store the documents received (risk assessment plans, self-declarations and certificates of conformity) in a register, which is to be published on a website.

In the event of a severe **incident or accident**, economic operators, EU carriers and non-EU carriers would be obliged to immediately inform the competent authority in whose territory it occurred and communicate the estimated quantities of losses. They would also have to take measures to limit the health or environmental consequences and to prevent further incidents or accidents.

Compliance, complaints and penalties

National competent authorities would be in charge of **verifying compliance** with the obligations imposed by the regulation, by performing environmental inspections and other checks, taking into account information provided by certifiers and economic operators (such as self-declarations and risk assessment plans) as well as addressing **substantiated complaints** submitted by natural or legal persons or organisations. Where they deem it necessary, competent authorities would be able to ask operators to amend their risk assessment plans, and to require operators and carriers to take further measures in the event of incidents or accidents.

The proposed regulation would set common criteria for determining the types and levels of **penalties** to be imposed by the Member States in the event of an infringement. Penalties should include fines that are proportionate to the turnover of the legal person or the income of the natural person responsible for committing the infringement. For legal persons, the maximum amount of fines should represent at least 4 % of the economic operator's annual turnover in the Member State concerned. Where damage to human health has occurred as a result of an infringement, Member States would have to ensure that the individuals affected have the right to claim and obtain **compensation** for that damage from the relevant natural or legal persons and, where appropriate, from the relevant competent authorities responsible for the infringement.

The proposal includes specific provisions on **assistance for compliance**. The Commission would need to develop awareness raising and training material on the sound implementation of the regulation's requirements. Member States should ensure that operators and carriers, especially micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, get access to information and assistance regarding compliance with the regulation. Member States' assistance could take the form of financial support, access to finance, specialised management and staff training, and organisational and technical assistance. The proposed regulation would start applying **18 months** after its entry into force.

Advisory committees

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted [its opinion](#) on 14 February 2024. The EESC insists on the urgent need to develop the envisaged standardised methodology for tracking and accurately estimating microplastic pellet losses along the entire supply chain. It takes the view that the Commission should consider provisions for intra-EU maritime transport if the IMO has not issued any rules by mid-2026. The committee recommends increasing the frequency of compliance verification and introducing a mid-term revision of the regulation to assess its efficiency and to review and, if needed, fine-tune the volume limit for pellet operations set in the relaxed regulatory requirements for micro and small enterprises. The EESC also calls for increasing awareness and training levels across the workforce, and for stepping up science and research activities to better understand the harmful effects of microplastic pellet pollution on human and ecological health.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) adopted its [opinion](#) on 18 April 2024. The CoR emphasises the need for clear, certain and simple rules to prevent differing interpretations by individual Member States and an excessive burden on public administrations. It suggests that maritime transport be included in the scope of the regulation, while also insisting that EU trade policy should ensure that there are no unfair advantages for producers and carriers from third countries with much lower standards. The Committee calls for strengthening the provisions on clean-up actions and proposes exploring how penalties and compensations could be used to support local and regional communities affected by pollution. The CoR recommends establishing an effective system to monitor the application of the provisions by individual Member States and stepping up inspection activities on the ground to ensure that the rules are implemented effectively.

National parliaments

The [deadline](#) for national parliaments to submit reasoned opinions on the grounds of subsidiarity was 9 February 2024. The Italian Chamber of Deputies issued a [reasoned opinion](#) on 31 January.

Stakeholder views⁵

The [deadline](#) for feedback on the proposal following its adoption was 17 January 2024. The Commission received 47 contributions in total.

On the industry side, [Plastics Europe](#) welcomes the fact that the proposal builds upon the principles recommended by the OSPAR Commission and developed under the OCS Europe certification scheme. It recommends expanding the definition of plastic pellets to cover additional physical forms of plastic resin (i.e. flakes and powders) used as feedstock in the production of plastic products. To encourage wider industry participation, it suggests lowering the threshold for medium and large operators to be subject to certification obligations from 1 000 tonnes per year, as proposed by the Commission, to a lower value. In conjunction with this lower threshold, Plastics Europe proposes certification with extended certificate validity for low tonnage operators (i.e. below the 1 000 tonnes per year threshold) to further enhance the effectiveness of pellet loss prevention measures for these operators.

[European Plastics Converters](#) do not oppose an extension to powders and flakes, but propose making a distinction between pellets and plastics dust, for which the focus should be on prevention. They ask for appropriate measures to support SMEs, including obligations for the Commission and Member States to organise and support training, fiscal incentives for equipment acquisition and postponed entry into force for smaller companies. In their view, measures listed in Annex I should not be made mandatory in the legislative process, as not all risk management measures are applicable to every company. Some margin of interpretation should be left to Member States as regards penalties and sanctions, especially concerning the suspension of activity. When it comes to establishing the methodology to measure pellet loss, Commission guidance would be faster and more flexible than standardisation.

The European Waste Management Association ([FEAD](#)) stresses the need for existing national schemes to be taken into account and recognised in future in certifications. Rather than imposing new certifications, integrating the new requirements into existing certifications would reduce the administrative burden and related costs while bringing as many benefits. While supporting the introduction of mandatory risk assessment plans, FEAD insists that the list of equipment and procedures in Annex I, to be considered when establishing the plans, should remain indicative, as the most appropriate equipment and/or procedures depend on the characteristics of each plant and should be determined by experts and professionals based on their technical feasibility.

[Plastic Recyclers Europe](#) overall support the proposal, stressing that increasing the capture of microplastics throughout all relevant stages of plastic products lifecycle is key to achieving plastics circularity.

The Federation of European private port companies and terminals ([FEPORT](#)) asks for clarifications on how seaport terminal operators performing cargo-handling operations are classified under the proposed regulation. It recommends extending the exemptions granted to EMAS-certified companies to those certified via ISO 14.001, given that this standard is used by many terminal operators for the certification of their environmental management systems and the validity of ISO audit schemes is already recognised under other EU initiatives such as [CountEmissionsEU](#).

On the side of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the [Rethink Plastic Alliance](#) welcomes some promising elements of the proposal, such as the priority given to prevention, mandatory certification, transparency in reporting, access to justice and penalty measures. At the same time, the Alliance [calls](#) for removing exemptions for SMEs and exemptions from independent compliance checks and audits; including all pre-production plastic pellet forms; and accelerating certification and verification to prevent and mitigate losses. NGOs recommend strengthening prevention measures to ensure legally binding minimum requirements, notably in alignment with the recommendations made by OSPAR in 2021. In their view, all handlers should be required to organise regular training sessions, irrespective of the operator's size; and all operators, including SMEs, should be mandated to report losses. Audits by independent third parties should be mandatory for all pellet handlers.

Legislative process

European Parliament

The file was referred to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), which appointed João Albuquerque (S&D, Portugal) as rapporteur on 27 November 2023. The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), associated under Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure, delivered its [opinion](#) on 21 February 2024 (rapporteur: Maria Spyraiki, EPP, Greece).

The ENVI committee adopted its [report](#) on 19 March 2024, with 71 votes in favour, 5 against and one abstention. The report clarifies that the law's ultimate goal is to achieve zero plastic pellet losses. It would expand the plastic pellet **definition** to include powders, cylinders, beads and flakes. Additionally, it proposes a new, separate definition for plastic pellet dust (industrial residue from the handling, grinding or processing of pellets not used as a feedstock for plastic product manufacturing). Furthermore, to prevent the spread of pellet dust in the air and on site, it suggests adding filters to the equipment for prevention listed in Annex I. The report would bring **transport** of plastic pellets in general under the regulation's scope, meaning that maritime transport would also be covered. Specific measures and equipment applicable to maritime and inland waterway transport would be added to Annex III.

Economic operators would be required to **label** all storage and transport containers holding plastic pellets with a specific [pictogram](#) ('hazardous to the environment'), signal word ('danger') and precautionary statements on the need to avoid release to the environment, collect any spillage and ensure proper end-of-life management. The report would require that the risk assessment plans to be established by economic operators also contain 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. The report would make it **mandatory** for economic operators to put in place the procedures and equipment listed in Annex I (for micro-enterprises, the list would remain indicative). However, **exemptions** to the installation of certain types of equipment or the adoption of certain measures would be possible for economic operators that are able to justify them to the competent authorities, taking into account the nature and size of the installation as well as the scale of its operations.

Small, medium and large enterprises operating installations handling **under 1 000 tonnes** of pellets annually and micro enterprises would have to notify updates of their risk assessment plans and renewals of their self-declarations of conformity every 3 years. Small, medium and large enterprises running installations handling **over 1 000 tonnes** of pellets per year would be subject to the

certification obligation. Small-sized enterprises would need to obtain such certification only once (within 5 years of the regulation's entry force), and the certificate would be valid for 5 years (compared to 3 years for both large- and medium-sized enterprises). All economic operators that are not micro-enterprises, as well as EU and non-EU carriers, would need to establish awareness and **training programmes** on issues such as prevention, containment and clean-up, equipment use and maintenance, execution procedures, and pellet loss monitoring and reporting. The report would introduce a specific form for **loss tracking** to be completed after each incident, communicated to the competent authorities and included in the register.

Where the infringement of the regulation poses an immediate danger to human health or threatens to cause an immediate significant adverse effect upon the environment, the report would require competent authorities to **suspend** the operation of the installation until compliance is restored. The maximum fine for legal persons in case of an infringement would be set at a minimum of 3 % of the economic operator's annual turnover in the EU. Member States should endeavour to ensure that revenues from penalties are used to support projects for cleaning up areas polluted by plastic before the regulation's entry into force and for avoiding plastic pellet pollution.

Within a year of the regulation's entry into force, the Commission would have to **develop and fund** awareness raising and training materials, possibly in the form of guides and courses. The report introduces a **review clause**, requiring the Commission to monitor the regulation's application and developments at the IMO level and to publish, within 8 years of the regulation's entry into force, a report on its application and effectiveness, possibly accompanied by a legislative proposal. Within 2 years of entry into force, the Commission would also have to issue a report on the possibility of introducing chemical traceability of plastic pellets, with a legislative proposal if appropriate.

The Parliament is expected to vote on its position during its second April 2024 plenary session. The new Parliament will then follow up on the file after the European elections.

Council

The Council has yet to adopt its general approach. EU environment ministers held [a policy debate](#) on the proposal at the Environment Council on 25 March 2024. They discussed in particular the adequacy of the measures proposed, the allocation of responsibilities to different public and private players, notably on compliance checking, and the need to include measures on maritime transport.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Rakstelyte A., [Combating microplastic pollution in the EU: Unintentional releases of plastic pellets](#), initial appraisal of a Commission impact assessment, EPRS, European Parliament, January 2024.

OTHER SOURCES

[Preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution](#), Legislative Observatory (OEIL), European Parliament.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Such ingestion can cause internal injuries and impair their ability to breathe, swallow and digest food, or it can lead to death.
- ² Microorganisms can colonise numerous surface types, including plastic particles, and form biofilms, which contain diverse bacteria, algae, protozoans and fungi.
- ³ On this, see the comprehensive report by the World Health Organisation (WHO): WHO (2022), [Dietary and inhalation exposure to nano- and microplastic particles and potential implications for human health](#).
- ⁴ Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2055 introduces a requirement (starting from 2026) for manufacturers and industrial downstream users of pellets, flakes and powders used as feedstock in plastic manufacturing at industrial sites to report annually to the ECHA the estimated quantity of microplastics released to the environment. Information collected under the proposed regulation on plastic pellets could thus be used as part of compliance efforts under this requirement.
- ⁵ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'European Parliament supporting analysis'.

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eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

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