

Nitrosamines in balloons – blown out of proportion

Thursday 21st February 2019

With a balloon comes a smile. Balloons are a much-loved product across the world and bring joy to millions of people without a barrier to language.

The European Balloon & Party Council (EBPC) welcomes the work of the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) and their contribution to creating a safer environment for consumers. In their most recent report¹ (2018 testing), they claim a quarter of balloons do not meet the necessary safety standards.



However, what they have not advised the media and consumers is that there is a European wide problem with the reliability of test results. Although the wide variation and reliability is of concern, the vast majority of members samples that are re-tested are found to be safely in compliance.

False results and variations

The EBPC works to consistently improve the safety of our members products and provides industry wide education to its members to ensure safety remains a priority.

There are further concerns about the industry wide challenge that remains in the accuracy of the testing performed within laboratories for safety of balloons. As a result of these variations and negative publicity the EBPC undertook its own ‘blind’ round robin test to understand the origin of this variation. To ensure there was no variation in our samples – we designed our test balloons to be dipped from the same chemical batch of latex from a single ‘pot’. The test samples were packaged and sent to 9 different accredited European laboratories and identified as 3 different samples. The laboratories were unaware of our ‘blind’ round robin test, all of whom were contacted individually beforehand to book the testing to be conducted in the same week.

The test results provide evidence of an alarming variation in the level of N-nitrosamines and N-nitrosatable substances detected in 27 chemically identical balloons. In fact, the results showed a variation in excess of 75% whilst some of the laboratories exceeded their own MoU (measurement of uncertainty- a claim of the laboratory measurement of accuracy of results). The 9 laboratories reported that their MoU ranges between 9% - 50%. One laboratory claimed an accuracy of 10% but was measured to be 30%. One laboratory sent the samples to another of our chosen laboratories and returned 6 hugely variable results whereas another detected nothing. This variability is currently being investigated further. Our investigation provides evidence of a reliability issue in how the test is performed.

1 <https://www.nvwa.nl/onderwerpen/productonderzoeken-op-merknaam/documenten/consument/consumentenartikelen/non-food/speelgoed/onderzoek-ballonnen>



On a positive note, there is evidence of considerable improvements to the industry since NVWA have been monitoring nitrosamines. Only 24% were found to exceed the limit in 2018 as opposed to nearly 80% nitrosatables in 2004. The vast majority of EBPC members products comply with the regulatory limits which is very positive.

Suteesh Chumber, Director General of EBPC said:

“We continue to recognise the importance of the work that NVWA undertakes to protect consumers, but the question of accuracy and reliable reporting remains unchallenged with such a large variation. It is increasingly important to also recognise reputable members with millions of complying products that bring joy and smile across the world. We would welcome the surveillance and national authorities to collaborate with the industry to understand and solve the issues in unreliable testing”.

Proportionality & risk

Chemical limits are usually calculated on extreme cases by maximum possible exposure times, they are not hard limits to cause and effect and it would not be uncommon to have a buffer zone.

The EBPC continues to build a reputable industry by ensuring members are always improving their safety standards and sell products of very high standards.

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Notes to Editors:

The European Balloon & Party Council (EBPC) is made up of over 45 key players in the industry who work closely to promote the safe and responsible use of balloons. The association is working hard to represent its members on key issues that arise within the EU, whilst providing members with communication on new directives and legislation. In 2016 The EBPC launched a Code of Best Practice campaign, which will reach out to consumers as well as those in the industry. This is the first campaign of its kind in Europe and encompasses the safe enjoyment and handling of balloons and party products.

In order to comply with its mission statement: 'To educate and promote the fun use of balloons and party products safely, ethically and in respect of the environment', the European Balloon & Party Council (EBPC) does not support balloon releases in its bid to protect the environment from unnecessary litter.

Further information about EBPC can be found at <http://www.ebpcouncil.eu/>

Our Partysafe initiative can be found here: www.partysafe.eu

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