

Frequently Asked Questions on Detergents

1. What is a detergent?

A detergent is any substance or preparation containing soaps and/or other surfactants intended for washing and cleaning processes. A detergent may be in any form and marketed for or used in household, institutional or industrial purposes.

Other products to be considered as detergents are:

- 'Auxiliary washing preparation', intended for soaking (prewashing), rinsing or bleaching clothes, household linen, etc.;
- 'Laundry fabric-softener', intended to modify the feel of fabrics in processes which are to complement the washing of fabrics;
- 'Cleaning preparation', intended for domestic all purposes cleaners and/or other cleaning of surfaces (e.g.: materials, products, machinery, mechanical appliances, means of transport and associated equipment, instruments, apparatus, etc.);
- 'Other cleaning and washing preparations', intended for any other washing and cleaning processes.

2. What is a surfactant?

'Surfactant' means any organic substance and/or preparation used in detergents, which has surface-active properties and which consists of one or more hydrophilic and one or more hydrophobic groups of such a nature and size that it is capable of reducing the surface tension of water, and of forming spreading or adsorption monolayers at the water-air interface, and of forming emulsions and/or microemulsions and/or micelles, and of adsorption at water-solid interfaces.

3. What is the difference between primary and ultimate aerobic biodegradation?

Primary biodegradation changes the structure of a surfactant by micro-organisms resulting in the loss of its surface-active properties due to the degradation of the parent substance and consequential loss of the surface-active property as measured by test methods listed in [Annex II](#).

Ultimate aerobic biodegradation is achieved when the surfactant is totally used by micro-organisms in the presence of oxygen resulting in its breakdown to carbon dioxide, water and mineral salts of any other elements present (mineralisation), as measured by test methods listed in [Annex III](#), and new microbial cellular constituents (biomass).

4. What are the limitations based on the biodegradability of surfactants?

Surfactants and detergents containing surfactants that meet the criteria for ultimate aerobic biodegradation as laid down in Annex III may be placed on the market without further limitations relating to biodegradability. If a detergent contains surfactants for

FAQs - Chemicals

which the level of ultimate aerobic biodegradation is lower than that stipulated in [Annex III](#), manufacturers of industrial or institutional detergents containing surfactants, and/or of surfactants for industrial or institutional detergents, may ask for derogation ([Article V](#)).

The level of primary biodegradability shall be measured for all surfactants in detergents failing ultimate aerobic biodegradation tests. Detergent surfactants, for which the level of primary biodegradability is lower than that stipulated in [Annex II](#), shall not be granted derogation.

5. What are the labelling requirements?

The following information must appear in legible, visible and indelible characters on the packaging in which the detergents are put up for sale to the consumer:

- (i) the name and trade name of the product;
- (ii) the name or trade name or trademark and full address and telephone number of the party responsible for placing the product on the market;
- (iii) the address, email address, where available, and telephone number from which the ingredient datasheet ([Article 9\(3\)](#)) can be obtained.

The same information must appear on all documents accompanying detergents transported in bulk.

The packaging of detergents shall indicate the content and if required shall also indicate instructions for use and special precautions.

Additionally, the packaging of detergents sold to the general public intended to be used as laundry detergents shall bear the information provided for in [Annex VII B](#).

6. What language/s is/are accepted on detergents marketed in Malta?

The information specified in question no. 5 must appear in at least *one* of the following languages: Maltese, English, Italian.

7. Is there any additional information that must be included on the label?

On the label, the manufacturer of the detergent product must also include the address of a website where consumers can obtain the complete list of ingredients. Also it is compulsory to declare allergenic fragrances present in detergents irrespective of the way they are added, as such at concentrations exceeding 0,01 % w/w as stipulated in [Directive 2003/15/EC](#).

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