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EU Environment Council adopts new rules for more sustainable batteries



The regulation is intended to ensure the sustainable use of batteries along the entire value chain throughout the EU.

Today in Brussels, EU environment ministers unanimously adopted the Council position on the EU batteries regulation. The regulation is intended to ensure more sustainable use of batteries along the entire value chain throughout the EU. To achieve this, a carbon footprint will be introduced for electric vehicle batteries and the replaceability of portable batteries improved. In addition, social and corporate due diligence obligations regarding the extraction of raw materials and more ambitious collection and recycling targets will be established. Other topics at the Environment Council included aspects of the EU Fit for 55 package, further developing CO₂ limit values for vehicle fleets and introducing a separate emissions trading scheme for heating and transport.

Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke: "Batteries are a key component for a successful energy transition. They store energy for electric cars and electrical appliances as well as from solar panels on residential buildings and houses. But batteries also contain valuable raw materials and contaminants. What is beneficial for climate action must not lead to more destruction of nature or further damage to the environment. In the EU, we want to produce batteries as sustainably as possible in the future, use them for a long time and keep them in the material cycle through recycling. By enhancing social and environmental standards along the supply chain, Europe is taking on a leading role worldwide. Consumers should be able to rely on the sustainability of batteries. We are therefore creating transparency by introducing a carbon footprint for batteries in electric cars. The more ambitious collection and recycling targets at EU level will ensure more reliable collection and recycling of waste batteries. We have had positive experiences with this in Germany, and in the past have exceeded EU requirements. And we want to do even more. That is why we are pushing for more ambitious targets at EU level."

The general approach on the batteries regulation achieved today in the Council is another important milestone on the road towards its adoption in the near future. The regulation is a ground-breaking reform on the EU internal market as it focusses for the first time on the entire life cycle of batteries. To reduce adverse impacts along the entire value chain, for example, the carbon footprint of electric vehicle batteries (traction batteries) and industrial batteries will be calculated. In addition, performance classes and limit values will be introduced for these batteries. The new batteries regulation envisages a recycle quota (recycled content quota) from 2031 for large traction and industrial batteries. The minimum quotas for recycled content will apply to lead, cobalt, lithium and nickel.

The regulation also specifies minimum requirements for the durability and performance of industrial batteries and portable batteries of general use. Through the regulation, EU partners want to ensure easy removal and replaceability of batteries in appliances and light means of transport (LMT) such as e-bikes. It should generally be possible, for instance, for batteries with a lifespan shorter than the life of the product in which they are installed to be replaced by end-users or independent repair shops. Collection targets for portable batteries are to be successively increased to 70 percent and 54 percent for LMT batteries (according to the draft regulation: 8 years after entry into force; likely up until 2030).

In addition, the batteries regulation lays down corporate due diligence obligations in a particular way: for the first time, the due diligence obligations of businesses along the supply chain of a given product group, in this case batteries, will be regulated. In particular, environmental aspects in international raw material supply chains will be significantly enhanced and signalling effects generated for future regulations. The first Digital Product Passport is to be introduced at European level with the battery passport. The passport will bundle together and make available key information from all stages of the life cycle of traction and industrial batteries.

The European Parliament already adopted its position with a large majority last week. According to the decision of the Environment Council, a final agreement is to be reached promptly in the trilogue process between the EU member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission. Following its entry into force, the batteries regulation will replace the EU Batteries Directive of 2006.

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