Concern consumers will be misled by recent claims regarding laundry detergents and environmental impacts

The Australian laundry products industry urges consumers to consider the facts in response to a campaign by 'Do Something!' that incorrectly claims phosphorus from laundry detergents causes widespread algal blooms in Australian waterways.

The campaign cites events from 20 years ago, without considering action taken in the mid-1990s by the Australian laundry detergent industry to reduce product phosphorus levels.[1]

In Australia, only very low levels of phosphorus from detergents reach waterways. Detergent phosphate ingredients are generally removed from waste water by sewage treatment plants.[2,3]

The vast majority of phosphorus reaching Australian waterways comes from agricultural sources or soil erosion.[4]

Most Australians live in coastal areas and are serviced by reliable and well-designed sewage treatment plants. Treated water from these plants is generally discharged to the ocean.[5] In this environment, phosphate ingredients have minimal environmental impact.

In contrast, the USA, Canada and Europe all have major inland urban centres and large populations on the shores of lakes. This population pattern, and its local impacts, may have influenced the decision to ban phosphate ingredients in laundry detergents.

The Australian industry takes its environmental responsibilities seriously.

Through ACCORD, the Phosphorus Standard for household laundry detergents was introduced and applied voluntarily across the industry since the mid-1990s. This Standard was developed under the oversight of the NSW Environment Department. It applies across the nation.

The Phosphorus Standard sets an upper limit of 7.8 grams – roughly one teaspoon – of phosphorus per wash. Products meeting this limit have a "P" logo on their label.

Also fundamental to this Standard was creation of a logo for products with no added phosphorus, so that these could be easily identified by consumers. These products have an "NP" logo on their label. No-added-phosphorus products are readily available in stores for Australian consumers to purchase.

Consumers will find a "P" or "NP" logo on virtually all laundry detergent products on the supermarket shelves of all major retailers, including ALDI, Coles and Woolworths.

Building on the Phosphorus Standard, the industry has over recent times introduced new product innovations. These have been aimed at improved performance for a better wash and a reduced environmental footprint overall.

Good laundry sustainability practices are also being promoted through the **www.washwise.org.au** consumer information website.

Consumers wanting to reduce the impact of doing the household wash should consider purchasing an ultra-concentrate product that performs well. Ultra-concentrates were widely introduced onto the Australian market in 2009.

These products deliver on all environmental fronts. Up to 50% less chemicals are used, compared to previous product types. This also delivers environmental savings in packaging and transport. And this reduces the overall footprint of industry products, assisting in key areas such as carbon pollution reduction and resource usage. Australian laundry detergents are amongst the most concentrated in the world.

Independent test surveys - like that conducted by CHOICE - also show that they are very effective and reliable at washing clothes and other household fabrics.[6]

Australian consumers can continue to use detergents marketed in Australia with confidence in both their cleaning performance and environmental safety.

1. Phosphorus in laundry detergents is present predominantly in phosphate-containing ingredients. These ingredients are 'builders', which enhance the action of surfactants by: softening water; helping disperse dirt and preventing its redeposition on to wash items; and providing alkalinity, which assists in dissolving oil-based stains.

2. Sewage treatment removes phosphorus to levels that are acceptable to Australian environmental regulators. This is especially important for sewage treatment operations that discharge into Australian rivers. For example, Sydney Water reports the following in relation to the Hawkesbury-Nepean River and its tributaries:

> *"Quality of treated wastewater for inland plants has improved significantly over the last 10 years due to plant upgrades designed to reduce key pollutants. Overall, since 2000-01 there has been about a 48% decrease in total nitrogen load and a 53% reduction in phosphorus load. The dry weather mass of nitrogen and phosphorus discharged to inland streams and rivers has remained low since 2002-03, when Sydney Water began the major upgrade program, despite rapid population growth."*
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> *Source: Sewage Treatment System Impact Monitoring Program, Annual Report 2009-10, October 2010*

3. The leading source of phosphorus entering sewage treatment plants is human excrement. Phosphorus from human waste is generally double that from detergents.

4. Point sources of phosphorus that can flow into rivers, like sewage treatment wastewater, contribute much less to the phosphorus load than do diffuse sources, such as agricultural and urban run-off. Diffuse sources are estimated to contribute 70-80% of the phosphorus load in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment.

> *Source: The State of NSW and Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water NSW 2010, Lower Hawkesbury-Nepean River nutrient management strategy, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, Sydney (citing Davis et al. 1998), from www.sydneywater.com.au/annualreport/performance/sustainability/clean_waterways_si.html#wastewater page 1 of 5*

5. For example, over 90% of Sydney Water's treated wastewater is discharged to the ocean. (Figure calculated from www.sydneywater.com.au/Oursystemsandoperations/WastewaterTreatmentPlants/)

6. www.choice.com.au/reviews-and-tests/household/laundry-and-cleaning/washing-and-drying/laundry-powders-review-and-compare/page/introduction.aspx.

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ACCORD is the national industry body for manufacturers and suppliers of consumer, cosmetic, hygiene and specialty products. Our industry's products include all types of cleaning agents, personal care products, cosmetics, fragrances, hygiene products, disinfectants, adhesives, sealants, protectants and other treatment products used in households, industry and other institutions.

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