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Amendment to the Act on Genetically Engineered Organisms

Report Categories:

Biotechnology and Other New Production
Technologies

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Report Highlights:

On Friday, February 6, 2015, Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski signed an amendment to the Act on genetically engineered (GE) organisms prepared by the Polish Parliament. The amendment implements stricter rules to ensure greater safety associated with the cultivation and use of GE organisms in laboratories. The amendment regulates cell growth in laboratories working on genetically engineered organisms. It mainly concerns contained use (e.g. in research centers involved in genetic engineering) of GE organisms and microorganisms. The new regulation specifies actions that must be taken in an event of failure to prevent the spread of these organisms outside the laboratory. The signed amendment brings Polish law in line with EU regulations.

General Information:

On Friday, February 6, 2015, Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski signed an amendment to the Act on genetically engineered organisms prepared by the Polish Parliament. The amendment implements stricter rules to ensure greater safety associated with the cultivation and use of GE organisms in the laboratories. The signed amendment brings Polish law in line with EU regulations.

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According to the amendment, the current system of issuing permits for the contained use of GE organisms is to be replaced by a system in which a "permit to operate a genetic engineering plant and the consent for the contained use of microorganisms and genetically engineered organisms" will be issued. In order for the permit to be issued certain conditions need to be fulfilled, e.g. security requirements concerning qualifications of those working with GE organisms, conditions of waste disposal.

Permits and approvals will be issued by the Minister of the Environment.

The amended Act introduces four categories within which each case of contained use of GE organisms must be categorized. Categorization of work depends on particular usage of GE organism (e.g. taking part in delivery of genes or undergoing genetic transformation), and possible effects which such actions can cause to humans, animals or plants. Category "I" means "activities resulting in no threats or causing limited danger", and the additional three categories mean activities that cause slight, moderate, and high threats.

According to the amendment, planned activities in category I require prior notification to the Minister of the Environment. Work to be conducted within categories II, III and IV require the Minister's formal consent. In order to obtain approval for work within Categories III or IV a plan must be submitted describing preparations for handling e.g. accidents involving involuntary release of GE organisms from the laboratory into the environment.

If an accident does occur, the new rules require that information about it be shared with other EU countries, if their territories may be exposed as a consequence. This obligation also includes sharing information about the rescue operation and its results.

The Act will come into force 30 days after its announcement in the Official Journal of Law.

The Polish Parliament is expected to continue work on additional regulations pertaining to GE organisms throughout 2015.