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Artists see red over cadmium ban

A Europe-wide restriction on the use of the chemical pigment is under consideration

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Alternative pigments "lack the vibrancy of cadmium colours", says Michael Craine, the managing director of Spectrum Artists' Paints

A Europe-wide ban of cadmium pigments in acrylic, oil and watercolour paints is under consideration that, if successful, could be enforced within two years.

The EU is [weighing a restriction on the chemical](#) following pressure from Sweden, which argues that artists pollute the food chain when they rinse their brushes in the sink. Cadmium ends up in sewage sludge and is then spread on agricultural land, according to a report submitted by Sweden to the European Chemical Agency (ECHA) last year.

But artists and paint manufacturers say they are being used as scapegoats. “[Nickel cadmium] batteries are the real problem, it's just an easy fix to ban everything with cadmium in it,” says Michael Craine, the managing director of Spectrum Artists' Paints. “Artists are not rotters; they are not tipping this stuff down the drain, it's an expensive substance.” Cadmium in its pure form is highly toxic, but the cadmium compounds used by artists' to create vivid yellows, oranges and reds are not hazardous according to Reach, an EU body that advises on the use of chemicals.

Artists were encouraged to take part in a consultation on the Swedish report that ended on 19 September. A decision from the ECHA is expected in December. If the ban is successful, Craine says it will radically change artists' palettes. “The alternatives are not replacement pigments,” he says. “They lack the vibrancy of cadmium colours, are muddy-looking and disappointing.”