

Consumer Detergents

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In April 2011, the European Commission (“EC”) fined three producers of washing powders a total of €315.2 million for operating a price-fixing cartel between January 2002 and March 2005 that covered eight Member States: Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands.

The Cartel

Among those companies named in the EC Decision as cartelists are Henkel, Procter & Gamble and Unilever. The cartel started when the companies implemented an initiative through their trade association to improve the environmental performance of detergent products, which evolved into a forum to coordinate prices and engaged in other anti-competitive practices.

The cartel concerned powder detergents used in washing machines, also known as HDD low suds powder. These are powder detergents designed for the bulk of automatic laundry washing by consumers. At the time of the infringement these products represented the largest category of laundry detergents.