

CER: Ceramics Directive (Council Directive 84/500/EEC), explained

The Ceramics Directive caps the lead and cadmium that ceramic tableware, cooking ware and storage vessels for food contact may release into food, and requires a written declaration of compliance from the manufacturer or an EU-established seller. Non-compliant articles have been banned since 17 October 1989, and the declaration rules of Commission Directive 2005/31/EC apply from 20 May 2006.

Reviewed 24 September 2026 by Conphora compliance team · Next review 11 March 2027 · Not legal advice

Key facts

Reference	Council Directive 84/500/EEC	Act type	Directive
In force	17 October 1984	Applies from	17 October 1989
Amended by	Commission Directive 2005/31/EC	Enforced by	Member States enforce the national laws transposing the directive through the official controls of the food contact materials framework, Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004, of which the directive is a specific measure; in Denmark, Fødevarestyrelsen (the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration) administers the rules: executive order nr. 681 of 25 May 2020 on food contact materials was issued by Fødevarestyrelsen under the Danish food act (sections 25, 25 a, 49(1) and 60(3)) and delegated powers, it implements the directive, extends the same lead and cadmium limits to enamelled articles and glassware, adds a mouth-rim limit for drinking vessels and makes Fødevarestyrelsen the authority to be notified when non-compliant materials are withdrawn.

Key dates

15 October 1984	Council Directive 84/500/EEC adopted by the Council in Luxembourg	title and signature block after Art. 6
17 October 1984	Directive notified to the Member States; the transposition periods of Article 5 run from this date	Art. 5(1) and footnote 5 to Art. 4(1)
20 October 1984	Publication in OJ L 277 of 20 October 1984, page 12	OJ L 277, 20.10.1984, p. 12
17 October 1987	Three years after notification: Member States must permit trade in ceramic articles that comply with the directive; deadline for the Council to set limits for the areas that touch the mouth and for the Commission to re-examine the limits and the lighting conditions of the test	Art. 4 and Art. 5(1), first indent
17 October 1989	Five years after notification: placing on the market of ceramic articles that do not comply with the directive is prohibited; Member States may also prohibit their manufacture	Art. 5(1), second indent, and Art. 5(2)
3 December 2004	Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004 in force: the framework for all food contact materials, with ceramics as one of the 17 material groups for which specific measures may be adopted; Directive 89/109/EEC repealed	Art. 5(1), Art. 26, Art. 28 and Annex I, point 3
20 May 2005	Commission Directive 2005/31/EC in force, the twentieth day after publication in OJ L 110 of 30 April 2005: it inserts Article 2a on the declaration of compliance, replaces Annex II with performance criteria for the analytical method and adds Annex III	Art. 1 and Art. 3
20 May 2006	Deadline for Member States to adopt and publish the laws transposing Directive 2005/31/EC; trade in and use of ceramic articles complying with it must be permitted from this date	Art. 2(1), first subparagraph and point (a)
27 October 2006	Article 17 of Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004 applies: traceability systems to identify the businesses from which and to which ceramic articles were supplied	Art. 17 and Art. 28
20 May 2007	Manufacture and importation into the Community of ceramic articles that do not comply with Directive 2005/31/EC (declaration of compliance, supporting	Art. 2(1), point (b)

documentation, analytical performance criteria) prohibited

1 August 2008	Regulation (EC) No 2023/2006 on good manufacturing practice applies to all sectors and to all stages of manufacture, processing and distribution of food contact materials, up to but excluding the production of starting substances, ceramics included	Art. 1, Art. 2 and Art. 8
14 December 2019	Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls applies and repeals Regulation (EC) No 882/2004, which Article 24(3) of the framework regulation still cites	Art. 146(1) and Art. 167(1)
1 July 2020	Danish executive order nr. 681 of 25 May 2020 on food contact materials in force, replacing order nr. 1248 of 30 October 2018: it implements the directive, applies the same lead and cadmium limits to ceramic and enamelled articles and glassware, adds a mouth-rim limit and requires the ceramics declaration of compliance up to and including retail	footnote 1, § 14, § 15, § 25 and bilag 4, 5 and 6
17 July 2025	TRIS notification 2025/0387/DK received: Denmark notifies a draft order that would repeal order nr. 681 of 25 May 2020, take effect on 1 January 2026 and apply lower lead and cadmium limits, expressed in micrograms, to ceramic and enamelled articles and glassware from 1 July 2026; standstill extended to 19 January 2026, Spain issued a detailed opinion, and as at 17 September 2026 Retsinformation still lists order nr. 681 as the order in force	notification detail; § 10, § 16 and bilag 5; document status

Obligations by role

Manufacturer of the finished ceramic article

- Keep the lead and cadmium released by each article within the limit for its category: 0,8 mg/dm² lead and 0,07 mg/dm² cadmium for category 1 (non-fillable or up to 25 mm deep), 4,0 mg/l and 0,3 mg/l for category 2 (other fillable articles), 1,5 mg/l and 0,1 mg/l for category 3 (cooking ware, packaging and storage vessels above three litres). Art. 2(1) and Art. 2(4)
- Determine migration with the Annex I test: 4 % (v/v) acetic acid freshly prepared, 22 ± 2 °C for 24 ± 0,5 hours, fillable articles filled to within 1 mm of the overflow point (6 mm along a flat or sloping rim), non-fillable articles immersed after protecting the non-contact surface, the sample covered and kept in total darkness when cadmium is determined, and lidded vessels tested as vessel and lid separately.
Art. 2(2), Art. 2(3) and Annex I, points 1 to 4
- Use an instrumental method of analysis that meets the Annex II performance criteria: detection limits of at most 0,1 mg/l lead and 0,01 mg/l cadmium, quantification limits of at most 0,2 and 0,02 mg/l, recovery of 80 to 120 %, freedom from matrix and spectral interference, a blank for each series, and samples washed in household detergent at about 40 °C and not handled on the test surface afterwards.
Annex II, points 2, 4 and 5 (M1)
- Rely on the tolerance only as the directive allows: an article exceeding a limit by no more than 50 % still passes if at least three other articles of the same shape, dimensions, decoration and glaze are tested and their average does not exceed the limit, with none of them exceeding it by more than 50 %. Art. 2(5)
- Issue the written declaration of compliance for articles not yet in contact with food, so that it accompanies them at every marketing stage up to and including retail, stating your identity and address and those of the importer into the Union, the identity of the article, the date, and the confirmation that the article meets the relevant requirements of the directive and of Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004; make it easy to match to the goods and renew it when substantial changes in production alter the lead or cadmium migration. Art. 2a(1) and Annex III
- Keep appropriate documentation demonstrating compliance with the migration limits, containing the results of the analysis carried out, the test conditions and the name and address of the laboratory that performed the testing, and make it available to the national competent authorities on request. Art. 2a(2)
- Manufacture under good manufacturing practice with a documented quality assurance system, a quality control system and records of specifications, formulae, processing and controls available to the authorities, so that the articles do not transfer constituents to food in quantities that endanger health, change the food unacceptably or spoil its taste or smell. Art. 3(1); Art. 4, Art. 5, Art. 6 and Art. 7
- Manufacture under good manufacturing practice with a documented quality assurance system and a quality control system, so that the articles do not transfer constituents to food in quantities that endanger health, change the food unacceptably or spoil its taste or smell. Art. 3(1); Art. 4, Art. 5 and Art. 6
- Keep documentation on specifications, formulae, processing and quality control results and make it available to the competent authorities on request. Art. 7
- Label articles not yet in contact with food with the words for food contact, a specific indication of use or the Annex II symbol unless the article is clearly intended for food contact, any special instructions for safe use, your name or trade name and address, and the identification that ensures traceability; keep systems that identify the businesses you supplied and were supplied by.
Art. 15(1), Art. 15(2), Art. 15(3) and Art. 17(2)
- Label articles not yet in contact with food with the words for food contact, a specific indication of use or the Annex II symbol, unless the article is clearly intended for food contact, and with any special instructions for safe and appropriate use. Art. 15(1), points (a) and (b), and Art. 15(2)

- Put your name or trade name and address or registered office on the article, its packaging, a label or the accompanying documents. Art. 15(1), point (c)
- Label or otherwise identify the articles so that they can be traced. Art. 15(1), point (d), and Art. 17(2)
- Keep systems and procedures that identify the businesses you supplied and the businesses that supplied you, and make that information available to the competent authorities on demand. Art. 17(2)

Importer into the Union, or seller established in the Union responsible for placing on the market

- Import only ceramic articles that meet the category limits: since 20 May 2007 Member States must prohibit the importation into the Union of ceramic articles that do not comply with the directive as amended by Directive 2005/31/EC. Art. 2(1), point (b); Art. 2(4)
- Make sure a written declaration of compliance accompanies the articles from your first sale onwards; it may be issued by the manufacturer or by you as a seller established in the Union, and it must name both the manufacturer of the finished article and you as the importer, identify the article, carry a date and confirm compliance with the directive and Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004. Art. 2a(1) and Annex III
- Hold the supporting documentation, the analysis results, test conditions and the name and address of the testing laboratory, and make it available to the national competent authorities on request; the directive places this duty on the importer into the Union as well as on the manufacturer. Art. 2a(2)
- Put your name or trade name and address on the article, its packaging or a label as the seller responsible for placing on the market established within the Union, ensure the for food contact indication and any instructions are present, and keep traceability records of your suppliers and customers. Art. 15(1), points (a) to (d), and Art. 17(2)
- Put your name or trade name and address on the article, its packaging or a label as the seller established in the Union responsible for placing it on the market. Art. 15(1), point (c)
- Check that the for food contact indication and any special instructions for use are on the article, its packaging or a label. Art. 15(1), points (a) and (b)
- Keep systems and procedures that identify your suppliers and your business customers, and make that information available to the competent authorities on demand. Art. 17(2)
- In Denmark, if you consider or have reason to believe that ceramics you imported do not meet the food safety requirements and are no longer under your control, withdraw them from the market, notify Fødevarestyrelsen immediately and, where they have reached consumers, inform the consumers effectively and if necessary recall the articles. § 7
- In Denmark, also check drinking vessels against the mouth-rim limit and apply the same limits and test to enamelled articles and glassware, and make the ceramics declaration and background documentation available in the form the Danish order prescribes, including the option of publishing the declaration on your website if the next links in the chain are informed. § 14, § 15(1) and (2), bilag 4 and bilag 5, point 4
- In Denmark, also check drinking vessels against the mouth-rim limit, and apply the same limits and test to enamelled articles and glassware. § 14 and bilag 4
- In Denmark, make the ceramics declaration and background documentation available in the form the Danish order prescribes; the declaration may be published on your website if the next links in the chain are informed. § 15(1) and (2) and bilag 5, point 4

Distributor, wholesaler or retailer

- Sell only ceramic articles that are accompanied by the written declaration of compliance; the directive requires it at all marketing stages up to and including the retail stage for articles not yet in contact with food. Art. 2a(1)
- At the retail stage, display the labelling information on the article, its packaging, a label or a clearly visible notice nearby, and do not sell articles whose for food contact indication and instructions are not given in a language purchasers easily understand. Art. 15(4) and Art. 15(7)
- Keep systems and procedures that identify the businesses from which and to which the articles were supplied, and make that information available to the competent authorities on demand. Art. 17(2)
- In Denmark, do not market food contact materials that fail the general requirements, and as the responsible business withdraw non-compliant ceramics you have distributed, notify Fødevarestyrelsen and inform consumers where the articles have reached them. § 6(1) and § 7

Business operator (any stage of manufacture, processing or distribution)

- Ensure that the ceramic articles under your control do not, under normal or foreseeable conditions of use, transfer their constituents to food in quantities that could endanger human health, bring about an unacceptable change in the composition of the food or deteriorate its taste, smell or appearance, and that their labelling, advertising and presentation do not mislead consumers. Art. 3
- Operate an effective and documented quality assurance system proportionate to the size of the business, a quality control system that detects and corrects failures, and documentation on specifications, processing and control results available to the authorities. Art. 5, Art. 6 and Art. 7
- Operate an effective and documented quality assurance system proportionate to the size of the business, and a quality control system that detects and corrects failures. Art. 5 and Art. 6
- Keep documentation on specifications, processing and quality control results, and make it available to the competent authorities on request. Art. 7
- Have documentation available that demonstrates compliance with the specific measure and hand it to the competent authorities on demand; a food business that fills or uses ceramic articles must in Denmark use only compliant materials and only for their intended purpose. Art. 16(1); § 6(2)
- Where a specific measure applies, have documentation available that demonstrates compliance with it, and hand it to the competent authorities on demand. Art. 16(1)
- Cooperate with the official controls that Member States carry out under the Union rules on official food and feed controls, now Regulation (EU) 2017/625, with the EU and national reference laboratories for food contact materials supporting the analytical work. Art. 24; Art. 146(1)

Penalties

The directive contains no penalty article of its own: Member States had to amend their national laws so that trade in compliant ceramic articles was permitted from 17 October 1987 and the placing on the market of non-compliant articles was prohibited from 17 October 1989, and they may prohibit the manufacture of non-compliant articles. Sanctions come from the framework: Member States lay down the rules on sanctions for infringements of Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004, which must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive, enforce the rules through official controls, and may temporarily suspend or restrict the application of the EU limits on their territory where they have detailed grounds for concluding that an article endangers human health although it complies. In Denmark, executive order nr. 681 of 25 May 2020 prohibits the marketing of food contact materials that fail the general requirements, obliges the responsible business, producer or importer to withdraw non-compliant materials, notify Fødevarestyrelsen and inform or recall from consumers, and punishes with a fine infringements of the lead and cadmium limits and test rules for ceramic and enamelled articles and glassware, of the declaration and documentation duty, of Articles 3, 4(1) and (3) to (6), 11(5), 15 and 17 of the framework regulation and of Articles 4 to 7 of the good manufacturing practice regulation; the penalty rises to imprisonment of up to two years where the infringement was intentional or grossly negligent and harmed or endangered health or sought an economic gain, and companies can be held criminally liable. Art. 5; Art. 18, Art. 24 and Art. 25; § 6, § 7, § 17, § 18 and § 19

Checklist

- 1. Confirm each article is ceramic under Article 1(3) (inorganic mixture, shaped and fixed by firing, possibly glazed, enamelled or decorated) and is intended for food contact; treat decorative pieces, glass and enamelled metal separately and check the Danish rules for the latter two.
- 2. Classify every article into category 1, 2 or 3 from its shape, internal depth (25 mm) and capacity (three litres), and note lidded vessels and drinking vessels for the lid rule and, in Denmark, the rim limit (Article 2(3) and 2(4); bilag 4).
- 3. Have the food contact surface tested under Annex I conditions, 4 % acetic acid for 24 hours at 22 °C, by a laboratory whose instrumental method meets the Annex II detection, quantification and recovery criteria, and keep the report with the test conditions and the laboratory's name and address (Article 2a(2)).
- 4. Compare the results with the category limits, applying the 50 % tolerance only with three further articles of the same shape, dimensions, decoration and glaze (Article 2(5)); pay particular attention to coloured glazes and decorations, which Fødevarestyrelsen recommends making without lead and cadmium.
- 5. Draw up the written declaration of compliance with the four Annex III elements, manufacturer and importer identity and address, article identity, date and the confirmation of compliance with the directive and Regulation (EC) No 1935/2004, and make sure it travels with the goods up to and including retail (Article 2a(1)).
- 6. Set a trigger for renewing the declaration and retesting when a glaze, decoration, firing process or supplier changes in a way that could alter lead or cadmium migration (Annex III, last paragraph).
- 7. Apply the framework duties: good manufacturing practice with documented quality assurance and control (Regulation (EC) No 2023/2006), labelling with the for food contact indication where needed and the responsible seller's name and address (Article 15), and traceability records of suppliers and customers (Article 17).
- 8. In Denmark, register the withdrawal and notification procedure towards Fødevarestyrelsen (§ 7 of order nr. 681 of 25 May 2020) and decide whether the declaration will accompany the goods or be published on your website with the chain informed (§ 15(2)).
- 9. Follow the Danish draft order notified as TRIS 2025/0387/DK, which would lower the lead and cadmium limits to microgram levels from 1 July 2026, and the Commission's work on revised EU limits for lead, cadmium and other metals from ceramic and vitreous food contact materials, so that new products are designed to the coming limits.

Sources

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3. Document information, dates and relationships for CELEX 31984L0500 (EUR-Lex) — <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31984L0500>
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11. TRIS notification 2025/0387/DK, draft Danish order on food contact materials with lower lead and cadmium limits (European Commission) — <https://technical-regulation-information-system.ec.europa.eu/en/notification/27084>
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