Food Fight: BPA — Use It or Lose It?

Controversy has heated up in recent years over the safety of Bisphenol A (BPA), a common additive used in the plastic lining found inside most food cans and other consumer food packaging. As those who watch the industry continue to debate whether the chemical should continue to be used, *Food Manufacturing* asks two experts to sound off:

Is BPA safe to use in food packaging?

Dr. John Rost, Chairman, North American Metal Packaging Alliance Inc. (NAMPA)

With more than 1,500 different food items packed in metal packaging, today's metal cans play a critical role in feeding the world's population. This proven packaging technology allows seasonal produce to be globally accessible year round and maintains food products' exceptional nutritional value and fresh taste, at the lowest possible cost, all the while keeping food safe from contamination.

Yet, with persistent questions about the safety of chemicals used in can

Bobbi Chase Wilding, BPA Coordinator, National Workgroup for Safe Markets

A healthy change is coming to the grocery store. More and more companies are announcing moves away from the toxic chemical bisphenol A (BPA) in food packaging. As with the BPA-free transition that occurred with baby bottles, food manufacturers recognize that their customers want truly safe packaging.

Trade associations argue that BPA has been used safely for 50 years, so it's fine to use it in food packaging. The truth is, during the past half-century,

linings, consumers need to know some key facts. All food products packed today require the use of a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) “food grade” coating inside the can. These coatings, including epoxy resins with Bisphenol A (BPA), are applied to the interior of cans to eliminate interactions between the metal package and the food contents. Coatings prevent perforation defects that would allow bacteria and microorganisms to enter the can, thus maintaining the can's integrity and protecting against food poisoning. In fact, FDA records show there has not been an incidence of food-borne illness resulting from a failure of metal packaging in more than 36 years, coinciding with the rise of epoxy resin coatings as the industry standard.

Regulatory experts worldwide are in agreement regarding the safe use of BPA epoxy resin coatings in food packaging. Last fall, following a comprehensive review of the current scientific research on BPA, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) announced it saw no evidence that would prompt a change to its current safety assessment of the use of BPA. EFSA reviewed all studies that have alleged various health effects from BPA and deemed them inadequate or irrelevant to human health. EFSA’s conclusion is consistent with that of scientific experts at the World Health Organization, which completed a similar BPA review in November 2010. National agencies in the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States concluded the same — that BPA is safe for use in metal packaging. Despite their determination of BPA’s safety in food contact applications, these agencies are continuing to monitor the science on the issue. Some rates of diseases linked to BPA and other synthetic chemicals have risen, including diabetes, reproductive dysfunctions, breast and prostate cancers and learning disabilities.

There is broad scientific recognition of the problems posed by BPA. Canada declared BPA “toxic,” and the National Toxicology Program and U.S. Food and Drug Administration have acknowledged “some concern” for brain behavior and prostate cancer based on current levels of BPA in humans, while confirming that contaminated food is a primary source. In 2007, 38 of the world’s leading BPA researchers issued a consensus statement, concluding that the levels of BPA in people are above those shown to cause harm in laboratory studies. Since then, the evidence has only become more convincing.

Canned foods likely play a significant role in these exposures. Last summer, the National Workgroup for Safe Markets released the report, No Silver Lining. Food packed in cans likely to be lined with BPA-based epoxy were tested, and the results were shocking. 90% of canned foods had detectible levels of BPA, and some were alarmingly high. By eating just one serving of canned green beans during pregnancy, a woman could expose her vulnerable fetus to levels of BPA that increase aggression and predisposition to prostate cancer in animal studies.

By innovating and using materials that are known to be safe — as opposed to those known to disrupt our body’s normal functions or unstudied for their impacts — food manufacturers can show good business sense, ensure consumer confidence in their products, and protect public health. General Mills, ConAgra and Whole Foods have

agencies (including FDA) are conducting their own laboratory research to ensure that any new studies meet established regulatory standards.

Research on BPA dates back more than 50 years, and has been reviewed by scientific and regulatory authorities around the world. Consumers should look to these scientific regulatory experts for reassurance on the safety of metal packaging and not abandon proven technologies on the basis of unfounded fears.

announced transitions to BPA-free cans in certain products, and more companies are exploring alternatives.

BPA-free packaging would go a long way toward reducing Americans' BPA exposure, and, simply put, it's what people want. No one should have to worry that the food they feed their loved ones is contaminated with chemicals that could harm them. Continued use of BPA could pose significant financial, legal, reputational and regulatory liabilities. A one-time investment in truly non-toxic packaging now will ensure long-term product viability. It is an idea whose time has come.

What do you think about BPA? Share your comments below.

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