

BPA Leaches into Food, of 'Some Concern' to Human Health

By Jacque Torres,
Newsletter Coordinator

Increasing consumer demand for convenience products has brought attention to the impacts plastic, single use packages are having on human health.

Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical commonly used to make plastic food and beverage containers, plastic food wrap, baby bottles, large plastic water jugs and the linings of metal cans of foods and beverages like sodas, soups, fruits and vegetables.

BPA is also in the coating on the insides of lids on Ball, Kerr, Golden Harvest and Bernardin mason jars.

Scientists and consumers are concerned about BPA because it can leach from these products into the food they contain as they age and are exposed to heat. Producers and consumers are also concerned that the presence of BPA compromises the integrity of certified organic products.

The National Organic Program (NOP) issued a memo to certifying agencies in 2002 noting that BPA is among many food contact substances that are exempt from organic certification.

Consider this example to illustrate the hypocrisy of this exemption.

If a certified organic apple is dropped into a bin of conventional produce it's no longer considered organic, however, when organic certified producers use packages that leach synthetic chemicals into their organic food the NOP still considers it organic.

The exemption is also inconsistent with NOP's regulations. In Section 205.272 of the Code of Federal Regulations it states the following are prohibited in organic packaging; "(1) Packaging materials, and storage containers, or bins that contain a synthetic fungicide, preservative, or fumigant; (2) The use or re-use of any bag or container that has been in contact with any substance in such a manner as to compromise the organic integrity of any organically produced product or ingredient placed in those containers, unless such reusable bag or container has been thoroughly cleaned and poses no risk of contact of the organically produced product or ingredient with the substance used."

There is a list of 38 non-organic allowed and prohibited substances that may be present in certified organic foods, BPA is not on that list.

The NOP develops, implements and administers national production, handling and labeling standards for organic agricultural products. The NOP also accredits the certifying agents (foreign and domestic) who inspect organic production and handling operations to certify

that they meet USDA standards.

Recent research from the National Toxicology Program (NTP), of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, released in their Final Report on BPA, shows that this chemical is an estrogenic hormone disrupter, meaning it mimics estrogen in the body, and is of "some concern" to human health.

Studies showing that BPA causes reproductive damage and birth defects that lead to prostate and breast cancer in adulthood¹, or that link the chemical to higher risk of metabolic disorders such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and liver disorders² have not been recognized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The FDA maintains that BPA is safe.

The official FDA definition of safe, "reasonable certainty in the minds of competent scientists that a substance is not harmful under the intended conditions of use," can be open to interpretation.

Single use containers aren't meant for storing or preparing food and since it's not an intended use, leaching of chemicals under those circumstances (such as storing an open can of food in the refrigerator, or pouring hot liquid into a plastic bottle) is not considered in the data that supports the safety of BPA. Plastics made with BPA break down easily when heated, microwaved, washed with strong detergents or wrapped around acidic foods such as tomatoes.

"Based on the studies reviewed by [the] FDA, adverse effects occur in animals only at levels of BPA that are far higher orders of magnitude than those to which infants or adults are exposed. Therefore, FDA sees no reason to ban or otherwise restrict the uses now authorized at this time," FDA spokeswoman Stephanie Kwisnek said in an article published in Scientific America in February.

Other studies show that people are exposed to more BPA than the FDA acknowledges (the FDA does not consider all studies) and that these relatively low doses (less than one part per billion) of BPA are more damaging than ultra high doses, which the body more readily recognizes as toxic, especially in fetuses, children and adolescents.

"Children six years of age were found to have higher levels of BPA's by-product—glucuronide—in their urine than did mice dosed with the chemical that later developed cancer and other health issues," the Scientific America article stated.

The NTP Final Report on BPA issued in early September stated, "current human exposure to [BPA], a chemical used in many polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins, is of some concern for effects on development of the prostate gland and brain and for behavioral effects in fetuses, infants and children."

The full report is available at www.niehs.nih.gov.

The FDA first approved BPA as a "food container" in 1963. When the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 mandated that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conduct or review safety studies on chemicals before approving them as ingredients in consumer products, compounds like BPA were already on the market. BPA was not subject to the new rules nor required to undergo additional testing.

Potential health risks aside, the question of whether BPA's presence in organic foods compromises their integrity is difficult to answer for the USDA, the NOP and certification agencies alike. The certifying agency for the majority of the organic canned foods available at the Co-op is Quality Assurance International (QAI).

QAI does not consider BPA leaching into foods from packaging a compromise of organic integrity.

"We do what the USDA tells us to and we're waiting for them to give us guidance on BPA in packaging," said QAI spokesperson Greta Houlahan.

And, it took some time digging for Joan Shaffer, senior public affairs specialist for the Agricultural Marketing Service to find a memo from 2002 from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) interpreting the Code of Federal Regula-

tions to exempt food contact substances—like the lining of cans—from being subject to organic standards or included on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances.

"We certify organic operations the producer, processor, shipper and handler—all the way to the retail store. If there's a prohibited material in a product, complaints should be filed at www.ams.usda.gov/nop there is a link on the bottom right-hand side of the home page," said Schaffer. "We review every single complaint that we receive and begin an investigation if it merits it."

Co-op News posed nearly 20 serious questions during two interviews with the NOP via Schaffer in early and late October, after three promises to answer via email, the NOSB and Schaffer have refused to respond directly to our questions except this statement:

"The NOP does not regulate packaging except as stated in Section 205.272 of the NOP regulation, which prohibits the use of packaging materials and storage containers or bins that contain a synthetic fungicide, preservative or fumigant. BPA is none of these. Until such time that FDA declares BPA to be unsafe, the NOP has no authority to ban packaging materials containing BPA."

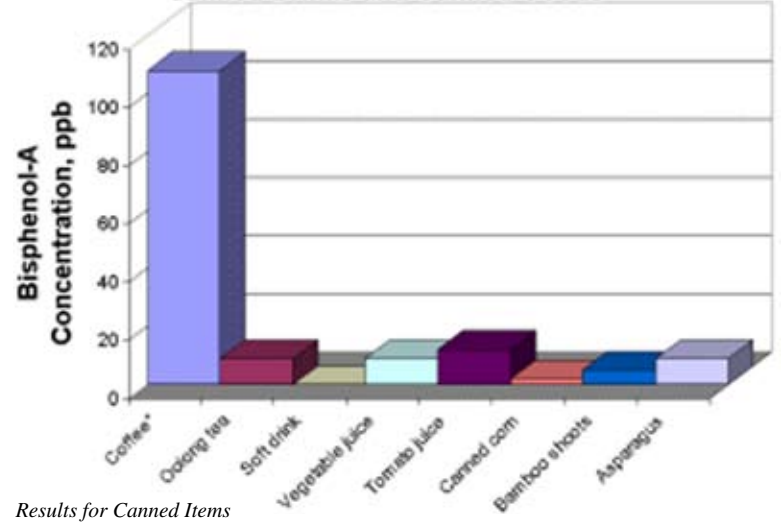
This statement only cites part 1 of CFR 205.272, part 2 is mentioned earlier in this article and gives the NOP authority to ban packaging materials containing BPA. To review the questions we posed or to ask the NOP yourself, visit www.northcoastco-op.com, click the Healthy Choices option then choose the Food Advocacy selection.

Co-op News asked Co-op member Beth Dominick—an organic consumer and farm inspector for California Certified Organic Farmers—if, personally, she would find the leaching of a non-organic chemical into certified organic

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National Organic Program Distorts Regulations, Ignores New Findings, Allows BPA in Certified Organic Foods

Leaching of Bisphenol-A from
Canned Drinks and Canned Goods



Prepared by Janet Raloff, senior editor of Science News.
www.sciencenews.org

Results for Canned Items

Co-op Fund Awards \$20,000 To Community Groups

Grant Funds Pilot Program for Regional Food Distribution

By Jacque Torres,
Newsletter Coordinator

The Co-op's Cooperative Community Fund awarded \$6,160 to the **Community Alliance for Family Farmers (CAFF)** to research and build a regional food distribution system to support the security and sustainability of our food shed.

Farmers are currently trucking their own small orders individually to the same buyers. CAFF's regional food distribution system will streamline deliveries from multiple farmers to refrigerated staging areas and then to colleges, schools, hospitals and other institutions committed to buying locally produced food.

The project will also simplify payments from large institutions to the farmers via an invoicing system to be piloted by CAFF making it much easier to fill and process the large orders for which these institutions have the demand.

Humboldt State University has a green campus policy and is committed to buying 100 percent local produce, however, farmers are currently only fulfilling about 20 percent of their needs.

The first step in development of the distribution system will be to run a pilot program of three to five deliveries to Humboldt State University.

The plan focuses on utilizing existing delivery routes, reducing costs of distribution from farm to buyer, reducing carbon footprint and improving the health of Humboldt County's food system, institutions and the residents they serve.

The Headwaters Fund, a public fund for the advancement of economic and community development, contributed more than \$40,000 to the project.

Other groups awarded grants include:

Ink People received \$2,000 for the Coffee Opp, a youth run coffee house at the Ink People Center for the Arts;

Arcata Endeavor received \$2,000 for the Back to Basics Program that teaches job and living skills to the homeless;

Food for People received \$2,000 for the Gleaning Program that salvages the last of the season's harvest for the food bank;

Arcata House received \$2,000 for the Transitional Housing Program;

Future Farmers of America, Eureka

Chapter received \$2,000 for Cooperative Marketing Test & Scholarships for young people interested in farming and co-ops;

Coastal Grove Charter School received \$2,000 for their Salad Bar School Lunch Program;

LUNA Kids received \$1,500 to furnish the Cooperative Preschool Classroom in Blue Lake with educational materials;

Northern Indian Development Council received \$500 for the Intertribal Gathering and Elders Dinner.

A total of \$20,160 distributed to community organizations.

CCF is a collection of funds for which the fund's appreciation/earnings are gifted to local non-profit organizations.

Co-op employees, members and shoppers for the past 18 years have given donations directly to CCF to build the endowment, which in turn enables the Fund to underwrite local projects.

The funds are distributed as grant awards to special community projects each year that meet the objectives of the mission statement:

"The Cooperative Community Fund (CCF) is a permanent endowment

established and directed by members of the North Coast Cooperative, which awards grants to support projects and the work of community organizations in Humboldt County.

Through collaborative grant making the Fund seeks to strengthen the community by emphasizing projects and activities that promote democratic cooperative principles, community development and food security."

Guidelines to apply for funds are available each September. The next deadline to receive proposals for consideration is October 1, 2009.

Since 1990, CCF has grown from a single fund to a collection of six funds totaling a little more than \$600,000.

That generosity has allowed CCF to gift more than \$396,000 to local community groups the past eighteen years.



Options & Alternatives to BPA Containing Packaging

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food a compromise of its integrity.

"Yes," said Dominick, "if I were to come across that circumstance I would issue a cease and desist. Then I'd prioritize a notice to send to the certifier who could take further action."

The only alternative lining without BPA is called C-enamel coating, a natural mixture of oil and a resin extracted from various plants, such as pine or balsam fir.

The Co-op News contacted the makers of all the canned products carried in our stores. Of the responses received by press time, all but one manufacture (Eden Organics) uses BPA lining in its canned foods and beverages, including Blue Sky Organic Soda. However, a majority of them are pursuing alternatives, some because they believe that BPA compromises the organic integrity of their products, some because of consumer demand.

Companies like Eden Organic, Amy's Natural Kitchen and Columbia Gorge have acknowledged that BPA compromises the integrity of their organic products. Eden Organics uses a BPA free lining in their cans of organic beans and are looking for alternatives for their tomato-based products as well.

Amy's Natural Kitchen has research

under way at their facility. After searching for an alternative without success, Amy's asked their can manufacturer to develop new, BPA-free can linings. The new cans have been filled with product and are in a waiting period before further testing is conducted. Amy's Natural Kitchen expects to have a verdict on the experimental linings by summer 2009.

Consider Your

Options:

Own Your Power as a consumer! Tell the National Organic Program that you do not want BPA in your organic food. File a complaint against companies marketed as USDA certified organic that carry their foods in BPA leaching packages. To file a complaint go to www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

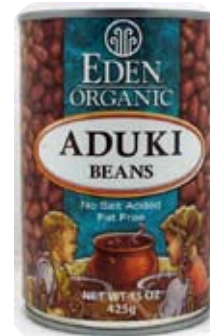
Also, on every canned, wrapped and vacuum-sealed package is contact information for customer comments and questions. Call, email, fax or snail mail the makers of your favorite packaged products!

Tell them what packaging you prefer; be it glass jars and bottles (some compa-

nies, such as Strauss Dairy, still put a deposit on jars they re-use), cans with different lining or aseptic packages.

C-Enamel Lining

Eden Organic canned beans are packed in steel cans coated with a baked on oleoresinous c-enamel lining that does not contain BPA. These cans cost 14 percent more than the industry standard cans which do contain BPA. Note that their canned tomato products are canned with a lining that does contain BPA.



Aseptic Packages

The juice box is the most commonly recognized form of this packaging that now holds a wide variety of products including soups, stocks, alternative milks and other products. They are made with three materials: about 70 percent paper, 24 percent polyethylene and



6 percent aluminum.

Aseptic packages can be recycled through a process called hydrapulping, which separates the paper from the plastic and aluminum so the paper fiber can be recycled into other paper products.

However, the Arcata Community Recycling Center (ACRC) does not accept aseptic packaging.

"The closest collection site is in Ukiah, but according to my research only 12 percent of the package is actually recovered in the hydrapulping process and the rest goes to landfill," said Allison Poklemba, education program manager for ACRC.

"So, for me it's better to throw it away than drive it miles to be partially reclaimed," said Poklemba.

"On the other hand, aseptic packaged foods are lighter and do not need to be refrigerated and the savings of that energy is significant enough to make that packaging worthwhile to some. Personally, my gut instinct is to go with glass."

Pacific Natural Foods has their line of soups and stocks available in aseptic packaging at both Co-op locations.

1. National Toxicology Program Final Report on Bisphenol A. www.niehs.nih.gov/news/releases/2008/bisphenol-a.cfm

2. Journal of the American Medical Association Vol. 300, No. 11, Published September 17, 2008.