

## EPA: Bisphenol A Is a 'Chemical Concern'

By Kathleen Doheny

April 6, 2010 — The Environmental Protection Agency will add the plastics chemical bisphenol A (BPA) to its "chemical concern" list due to potential environmental effects.

BPA is found in a range of products, including plastic bottles, liners of food cans, feeding cups, and some baby bottles (although several baby bottle manufacturers have stopped using it).

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released an action plan this week that focuses on the environmental effects of the chemical.

The action by the EPA follows an FDA announcement in January about concerns over BPA's potential impact on human health; the FDA said it will study the potential effects along with measures to reduce exposure to BPA in food packaging.

Some experts are concerned that exposure to BPA and its weak estrogen-like effects during critical periods of human development may be associated with a wide range of health problems, including behavioral effects, reproductive problems, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

"We share FDA's concern about the potential health impacts from BPA," says Steve Owens, assistant administrator of the EPA's Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, in a news release. While food packaging is regulated by the FDA, the new EPA action will look at the potential environmental impacts of BPA.

Environmental groups praise the new EPA decision, but an expert at the American Chemistry Council, an industry group, says BPA is not a risk to the environment.

### EPA's Action Plan on BPA

Each year, more than 1 million pounds of BPA are released into the environment, according to the EPA. The action plan, in addition to adding BPA to the chemical concern list, will:

- Require information on BPA concentration in ground water, drinking water, and surface water to see if the levels are of potential concern.
- Require manufacturers to provide test data to assist the agency in evaluating possible impacts, including long-term effect on growth, reproduction, and development in aquatic organisms and wildlife.
- Use the agency's Design for the Environment program to find ways to reduce unnecessary exposure -- such as assessing substitute materials -- while additional studies continue. Beginning in April, the EPA will focus on thermal and carbonless paper coatings, used in cash register receipts and elsewhere, to see if alternatives to BPA may be readily available.
- Continue the EPA evaluation of the impact of BPA on children and other populations through exposure for non-food packaging uses.

### Reactions to the EPA's Action Plan

Environmental groups praised the new EPA announcement, while an industry representative did not.

"We think it's laudable that the EPA is now in sync with other federal agencies, sharing the same level of concern as other federal agencies for the potential toxicity of bisphenol A," says Sarah Janssen, MD, PhD, MPH, staff scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council in San Francisco.

"We think it's great they are taking some steps using their existing authority, but their existing authority is very weak," Janssen says. In adding BPA to the chemical concern list, the EPA uses its authority under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

"TSCA is a fundamentally flawed law" that limits the EPA's ability to take action and "favors industry," Janssen tells WebMD.

"We're very happy with the action," says Alex Formuzis, a spokesperson of the Environmental Working Group in Washington, D.C. "It's an important development that we now have the EPA as well as the FDA scrutinizing the health and environmental risks this chemical poses."

Disagreeing is Steven Hentges, PhD, executive director of the Polycarbonate/BPA Global Group of the American Chemistry Council, an industry group in Arlington, Va. "We have an extensive scientific data showing that BPA is not a risk to the environment," he says. "The strong scientific database doesn't support concern about BPA in the environment."

#### SOURCES:

News release, Environmental Protection Agency.

Steven Hentges, PhD, executive director, Polycarbonate/BPA Global Group, American Chemistry Council, Arlington, Va.

Alex Formuzis, spokesperson, Environmental Working Group, Washington, D.C.

Sarah Janssen, MD, PhD, MPH, staff scientist, Natural Resources Defense Council, San Francisco.