

FDA Should Ban Bisphenol A in Food and Beverage Containers

Testimony of U.S. PIRG Public Health Advocate Elizabeth Hitchcock before the Science Board to the
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
August 17, 2009

Good afternoon. My name is Liz Hitchcock and I am a public health advocate for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. U.S. PIRG is the federation of state Public Interest Research Groups with offices across the country.

In response to the chair's inquiry, U.S. PIRG receives no corporate contributions. I have no personal conflict of interest and U.S. PIRG has no organizational conflict of interest in submitting this testimony.

We commend the Science Board for conducting this important public meeting, and for its re- review of the science around Bisphenol A. We look forward to the update on your progress.

I'd like to cover three important points at this public meeting.

- 1-The hazards of Bisphenol A are well documented and pose a special danger to children.
- 2-Other countries, a number of states and municipalities, along with retailers and manufacturers are acting in the absence of federal action on these chemicals;
- 3- The federal government should regulate this and other toxic chemicals to protect our children's health.

First, the hazards of Bisphenol A are well documented and pose a special danger to children.

More than 200 scientific studies have linked very low doses of bisphenol-A to cancers, impaired immune function, early onset of puberty, obesity, diabetes, and hyperactivity, among other problems. Our children are receiving repeated low doses of this endocrine disrupting chemical at a very vulnerable age along with the milk, formula and juice in their baby bottles and sippy cups.

U.S. PIRG and Environment California tested five of the most popular baby bottle brands on the market. Our research found that bottles tested from all five brands leached bisphenol-A at levels found to cause harm in numerous laboratory studies.

The National Toxicology Program at NIH has acknowledged health concerns about children's exposure to BPA. In their final report released a year ago, they said that current human exposure to bisphenol A is of "some concern" for effects on development of the prostate gland and brain and for behavioral effects in fetuses, infants and children, and "concluded that the possibility that BPA may affect human development cannot be dismissed."

Second, in the absence of federal action, other countries, a number of states, some manufacturers and retailers are leading the way in taking action on bisphenol A.

For example, the Canadian Government declared Bisphenol A "toxic" under Canadian Law, triggering a ban on baby bottles with that chemical. There were efforts in a number of state legislatures this year to restrict uses of BPA, with two states (Connecticut and Minnesota), the city of Chicago, and three New York State counties taking action to ban the chemical in children's food containers.

Senators Dianne Feinstein, Chuck Schumer and Rep. Ed Markey have introduced bills to regulate the use of bisphenol A, which U.S. PIRG supports.

Large retailers like WalMart have announced that they would discontinue selling products with the chemical. Nalgene, the maker of sport water bottles, announced last year that it would no longer use bisphenol A in its bottles. There are alternatives to bisphenol A and the industry is using them.

Given the significant health concerns associated with bisphenol A, a precautionary approach on the part of the Food and Drug Administration makes sense. In other words, given the scientific evidence that this chemical causes harm, we should exercise the good common sense to keep it out of the hands and mouths of our children.

Third, the federal government should regulate these and other toxic chemicals to protect our children's health.

Consumers cannot be expected to go it alone and we can't just count on all industry and retailers to take the right voluntary steps. The federal government should take action based on the overwhelming weight of evidence showing that chemicals like bisphenol-A may harm human health.

There are more than 80,000 chemicals on the market in the U.S., the vast majority of which lack even basic information on health effects and toxicity. At least 1,400 chemicals have known or probable links to cancer, birth defects, reproductive impacts, and other health problems such as learning disabilities.

U.S. PIRG joins the Breast Cancer Fund in urging the Food and Drug Administration to expedite its re-review of the safety of Bisphenol A. Vulnerable populations have waited long enough. We urge the agency to take action to ban Bisphenol A in food and beverage containers, including reusables like baby bottles, sport bottles and food containers, infant formula and canned food, and soda and water bottles.

Thank you.