

## Consumer fears spurring industry push for bisphenol A substitutes

By Rory Harrington, 21-Oct-2010

**Food and beverage companies are increasingly ditching bisphenol A (BPA) from food can linings in response to growing consumer concern over the chemical, according to a new report.**

The study – Seeking Safer Packaging – also found industry, rather than regulators, were taking a lead in getting rid of the substance from food packaging.

The research is based on a survey of 26 major food and beverage firms and was carried out by Green Century Capital Management, which describes itself as an environmentally-responsible investment firm, and shareholder advocacy group **As You Sow**. The report, an update to the one published last year, said it was “an evaluation of companies’ performance on addressing the problem of BPA in packaging”.

### Major shift

“Companies are actually moving faster than regulators in phasing out BPA from food and beverage packaging,” said report co-author Emily Stone of Green Century. “Our data shows that some companies in the food and beverage industry are wasting no time in transitioning out of [bisphenol A](#) (BPA) can linings.”

**As You Sow** research director Amy Galland said there had been a major shift by the food industry in its attitude to the chemical since 2009.

“Since our first report, there has been a significant change in the way that companies are talking about this issue and innovating solutions to the problem,” she said. “In 2009, only 7 per cent of companies surveyed had established internal timelines to phase out BPA from packaging, and this year we found that 32 per cent of companies have timelines – more than a 350 per cent increase.”

A commitment from some major players to eliminate BPA sent a clear message that it was possible for the sector to transition away from the chemical, added Galland.

“From the investor perspective, this is an important shift that is necessary to reduce chemical-related risks for these companies and help protect our assets,” she said.

### Grades

The study rated companies based on their actions in eradicating BPA from their packaging. Firms such as Hain Celestial, H.J. Heinz, ConAgra were awarded an ‘A’ grade - as each had “already begun using BPA-free can linings for some products” and had set out a broad timetable to eliminate the substance from all packaging. General Mills was given a B+ for committing to the introduction of a BPA-alternative in its canned tomatoes range but failed to receive top marks for not laying out a timeline for the rest of its products.

However, corporations such as Coca-Cola, Del Monte, Kraft and Wal-Mart were slammed by the report as “among those failing to keep pace with the industry leaders” and awarded ‘F’ grades.

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## **'Potential liabilities'**

Green Century also urged investors to be aware of the possible legal, reputational and regulatory problems that companies that continue to use BPA could face in future.

*"It is critical for investors to understand the potential liabilities for companies that use BPA in their products or product packaging,"* said Larisa Ruoff, Green Century's director of shareholder advocacy. *"With growing consumer and regulatory concern about the health effects of BPA, companies should phase out the chemical to avoid reputational, competitive, litigation and regulatory troubles."*

The groups pointed out that a number of US states had already banned or restricted BPA use in food contact materials for young children. They warned that companies failing to develop BPA alternatives *"could experience declined competitiveness in their own markets"*.

BPA is used in the epoxy linings of canned foods and beverages, as well as polycarbonate products. Its continued use in food contact materials is under scrutiny due to the publication of a raft of studies linking it to numerous harmful conditions such as cancer and heart disease.

While countries such as France and Denmark have restricted its use, both the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have declared current exposure levels present no health risks. However, the FDA has recommended certain groups reduce their exposure to the chemical, while the European Commission hinted earlier this month that it may take further action against BPA.