

## Major Corporations Respond to Consumer Demands to Remove BPA

by Brie Cadman | November 01, 2010 | 03:12 PM (PT)

It's rare that corporations voluntarily take a chemical out of their products without the government forcing them to do so, but public concern over bisphenol-A (BPA), an endocrine disruptor, has resulted in a phasing out of the substance, well ahead of federal regulation.

While it's true that BPA is still widely used, a recent report by **As You Sow**, an environmental and social responsibility group, and Green Capitol Management, an investment advisory firm, indicate that some food manufacturers are proactively responding to the public's health concerns.

The 2010 report, entitled "Seeking Safer Packaging," gave three large companies -- H.J.Heinz, ConAgra, and Hain Celestial -- the highest score, an A grade, for using BPA-free lining in some of their cans and developing timelines to completely eliminate the chemical from all of their products.

The report based the grades on whether the companies are exploring substitutes and committing to phase out BPA and their ability to disclose information about packaging.

The voluntary phase-out shows the ability of environmental health advocacy organizations and consumer voice to sway a corporations manufacturing practices, even as the government drags its feet.

In 2007, As You Sow and Green Century launched a campaign to educate companies and investors about the health impacts and financial risks of BPA. As they note on their website, by engaging in dialogue with General Mills, it switched to non-BPA can linings for the Muir Glen brand of organic tomatoes and became the first company to phase out BPA in linings.

Their first report grading companies on their use of BPA in their packaging, published in 2009, led to several shareholder dialogues with Campbell's Soup, Coca-Cola, Hain Celestial, Heinz and Pepsi.

While not of all the companies respond to consumer and environmental health groups, the **As You Sow** report highlights the financial pitfalls of not making consumer-friendly choices.

Most of us are exposed to BPA, which is used to strengthen plastics, by way of consumer products -- receipts; soda, beer and food cans; hard plastic bottles; and dental sealants. Nearly every canned food and beverage product contains the chemical.

The science linking the chemical to negative health effects continues to accumulate. In the lab, BPA has been linked to mammary and prostate cancers, infertility, and other reproductive problems in animals. Two similar studies of Chinese factory workers found that BPA exposure resulted in an increase in sexual dysfunction and [a decrease in sperm count](#).

But it's been hard to measure the level at which BPA causes harm. The FDA and National Toxicology Program, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are investigating the chemical, but hasn't taken any federal-level action. But instead of waiting for federal regulation, many states and local governments are moving forward. In 2009, California led a new movement of over 20 states to introduce bills to ban or regulate BPA.



Photo credit: Josh Berglund19

Although many companies in the **As You Sow** report received an F for their use of BPA -- including Coca-Cola, Delmonte, Safeway and Wal-Mart -- more retailers are aiming to go BPA-free and setting timelines to do so. Last year, only 7 percent of companies had a timeframe for phasing out BPA; this year 32 percent do.

It's easy to be cynical -- it's likely many of these companies are phasing out BPA in an attempt to boost sales and try to woo more customers, rather than a concern for health. And surely a company-by-company phase-out isn't as good as outright legislation getting rid of the stuff. But advocates helped bring this issue to the fore, consumers have voted with their dollar and a positive trend is being set.

To put pressure on companies to get rid of BPA in their packaging, [you can sign this petition telling Del Monte \(which received a F grade\), to say goodbye to BPA.](#)