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Friday, June 26, 2009

## FDA to reassess toxin in cans, plastic

San Francisco Business Times - by [Chris Rauber](#)

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A coalition of investors and other groups representing \$26 billion in assets has lauded the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration** for agreeing to reassess the safety of bisphenol A, a controversial chemical used frequently in can linings and hard plastics.

The coalition sent a letter to FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg on June 22, reiterating concerns about the safety of the chemical, also known as BPA. Bay Area members of the national coalition include the San Francisco-based Catholic Healthcare West hospital

network, **San Francisco's As You Sow nonprofit "corporate accountability" advocacy group**, Oakland's JOLT Catholic Coalition for Responsible Investing, and Harrington Investments, a Napa-based socially responsible investment group.

Other signers included representatives of Catholic Healthcare East in Pennsylvania, Boston's Trillium Asset Management, Seattle's Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment, and New York's **Christopher Reynolds Foundation**.

BPA is known to leach from can linings into food and beverages, and has been found in the urine of more than 90 percent of Americans tested by the **Centers for Disease Control**, the coalition said in a statement released earlier this week. Despite evidence linking the chemical to cancer, diabetes, developmental damage and heart disease in

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animals, it said, the FDA previously had maintained that the substance is safe.

“As investors, we’re concerned that the use of BPA, particularly in food and beverage packaging, may threaten shareholder value,” said Emily Stone of Boston’s Green Century Capital Management, the investment advisory firm that organized the letter to Hamburg. That letter, signed by 27 investors, advisory companies, foundations and shareholder advocacy groups, urged the FDA to ensure that it uses “sound independent, unbiased science” to assess BPA.

**Michael Passoff, associate director at As You Sow responsible for its corporate social responsibility program, told the San Francisco Business Times that As You Sow and Green Century have been leading the national effort, and noted that six major U.S. baby-bottle manufacturers have announced they are phasing out BPA in products sold here.**

The FDA has come under fire from many, including its own scientific subcommittee, for depending heavily on industry-supplied data in its prior evaluations of BPA’s safety, the group said.

Opponents, of course, have a very different take. Elizabeth Whelan, president of the **American Council on Science and Health**, wrote a June 23 op-ed for Forbes.com arguing that BPA is the “toxin du jour” of environmental activists who claim it causes “everything from cancer to learning disabilities and even obesity.”

The American Council on Science and Health describes itself as an independent consumer education consortium concerned with food, nutrition, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, lifestyle and the environment and health, but the group’s web site says it’s funded in part by industry groups, corporations and trade associations.

Whelan said the chemical has been used safely for roughly 60 years to make plastic bottles hard and shatter-proof, in coatings on metal food containers and in cell phones and medical devices, and contends that some advocacy groups are ignoring science and giving way to hysteria on the subject.

Even so, a number of jurisdictions, including Connecticut, Minnesota and Chicago, have taken steps to ban or limit use of BPA.

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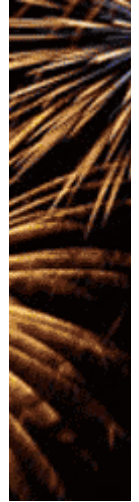
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