

Taco Bell's Parent Ditches BPA in Paper Receipts

Landon Hall | May 17, 2011



After years of sounding the bell on bisphenol-A, consumer advocates seem like they're finally succeeding in making it a dirty word for companies.

The do-gooder group **As You Sow** had been pressuring companies to get rid of BPA in the rolled-up paper they use in cash registers. On Monday, the group announced that Yum! Brands, the conglomerate that owns Irvine-based Taco Bell, as well as KFC and Pizza Hut, will no longer use BPA in customer receipts.

"Normally we're criticizing companies; we're happy to put out a release giving someone credit," said Michael Passoff, a senior strategist with **As You Sow**, which is based in San Francisco.

BPA is a chemical that has been used for decades in the manufacture of some plastics, as well as the lining of many metal food containers. Several studies have linked long-term exposure to a variety of health problems, including breast cancer, infertility and learning disabilities. BPA has been largely eliminated from items like baby bottles and sippy cups. Watch out for the number 7 or the letters "PC" on the recycling code of a bottle.

But BPA is still in us and all around us, and last summer the Environmental Working Group highlighted a report saying that BPA was also in receipt paper used by many retailers and banks. The chemical can easily come off onto dry fingers, but more of it appears to stay on fingers that are wet or greasy. Such as the kind you might get if you eat a bucket of fried chicken.

As You Sow's M.O. is to buy enough stock in a company (usually at least \$2,000 worth), or strike an alliance with someone who has, and file a shareholder resolution to shame the company into acting. It started making noise along those lines with Yum! Brands, only to find that the Louisville, Ky.-based company was already in the process of eliminating BPA from its inventory of receipt paper. "We were very pleasantly surprised by this," Passoff said.

The group also learned that Whole Foods Market began eliminating BPA last fall.

"The food industry has come under so much criticism, about everything from genetically engineered food to obesity, and they've been reactive to those issues. This was one they were proactive on," Passoff said. "That was very reassuring for us to hear that, as investors, that the company's on top of an issue before it blows up."

As You Sow tried something similar with Coca-Cola, to no avail.

Passoff said the group will target other companies, like Walmart.