

Major Food Companies Transitions Away from Toxic BPA Receipt Paper

May 19, 2011



image: by BenSpark on Flickr under CC

Two major companies – **Yum! Brands** (owner of KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell) and **Whole Foods** - are part of a growing industry trend transitioning away from cash register receipt paper made with the toxic chemical bisphenol A (BPA).

BPA has made headlines recently as scientists, health experts, and consumers press for a federal ban on food packaging made with the endocrine disruptive chemical that acts like a synthetic estrogen, shown to leach readily into infant formula, beverages, and canned food. Beverage giant Coca-Cola recently received attention for refusing to address investor concern on this issue. BPA exposure has been linked to breast and prostate cancer, infertility, learning disabilities, and a host of other health risks.

Yum! was near the conclusion of a previously established process of transitioning to a non-BPA receipt paper at all U.S. restaurants when it was first approached by the shareholder advocacy group **As You Sow**. Upon learning of Yum!'s action, **As You Sow**

withdrew a proposed proxy resolution that asked Yum! to reform its chemical policy. Andrew Behar, CEO of **As You Sow**, said, "we are glad to see that major companies are concerned about toxic chemical exposure and are willing to take action to protect the health of their workers and customers. We look forward to continued conversations with Yum! and other companies that are using the precautionary principle and are committed to making changes to their products and practices when science shows there is a problem."

A 2010 article in *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry*, "Transfer of bisphenol A from thermal printer paper to the skin," outlined that out of 13 thermal printing papers analyzed, 11 contained BPA. When taking hold of a receipt, BPA was transferred to the forefinger and the middle finger if the skin was rather dry, and wet or greasy fingers absorbed about 10 times more. Considering that Yum! is the global leader of the chicken, pizza, and Mexican-style fast food industries, this finger-licking culture was exposing consumers to a whole new set of health risks prior to the phase out of the BPA-laden receipt paper. "Most Americans are unaware that they are regularly exposed to BPA simply from holding cash register receipts," says Michael Passoff, Senior Strategist with **As You Sow**. "BPA transfers easily to our skin and then through our pores into the body. Many companies continue to ignore the current science around this toxic chemical exposure and consumers are unknowingly exposed to these toxic threats every day."

French and Swiss studies show that BPA passes through the skin. A study of pregnant women by Harvard showed that cashiers had the highest levels of BPA.

Yum! Brands and Whole Food have confirmed that they no longer purchase BPA cash register receipt paper. Yum! is in the process of depleting the system of previously purchased BPA receipt paper and inventory at distribution facilities; Whole Foods has been using non-BPA register paper at U.S. and Canadian stores since the fall of 2010.

These companies are leading the transition away from toxic chemicals because they weighed the risks and benefits and decided to take the precautionary route to protect their workers and customers. Investors view this as an important step in the right direction, but also recognize that alternatives need to be fully tested so that one problem is not substituted for another. Shareholders advocate that this same principle should be applied to all new products that come on-

to the market including the alternative register receipts, which are currently being evaluated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other independent researchers.

As You Sow is a nonprofit organization that promotes corporate responsibility through shareholder advocacy, coalition building, and innovative legal strategies. For more information visit www.asyousow.org