

Qs and As

1. What is BPA and what is it used for?

BPA is a chemical compound used in small amounts in packaging, and in many other products such as plates, mugs, and microwave ovenware. However in packaging the compound is not used directly but is a start point to create materials that help present and protect our food safely.

It is possibly the most researched chemical compound ever. Scientific evidence, as repeatedly verified by Regulatory authorities across the world including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), US FDA and Health Canada, confirms its safe use.

2. What are the alternatives?

There is no universal alternative that could replace the variety of materials that include BPA. They have been tailored over many years and each specific end use has been tested and approved to ensure consumer safety, food quality and technical performance. Food safety authorities have repeatedly come to the conclusion that the weight of evidence around the safety of BPA does not demand a change.

3. Is the industry moving away from using BPA?

No, the industry isn't moving away from BPA, its safety and integrity has been proven over many decades - if a decision is made to adopt an alternative, each end use will need to be tested and approved through regulatory compliance and industrial validation processes – which can take several years.

4. What is the industry reaction to the decision by France?

It is certainly disappointing that politicians have implemented legislation without having first investigated the impact on consumers. France has disregarded the safety evaluations of EFSA and other regulatory authorities and the action appears to be based on perceived hazard rather than risk. Crucially, France has effectively torn up the internationally recognised rule book.

5. Is it possible that some food businesses will no longer export to France or are alternatives to BPA in packaging already being lined up for production?

Each company in the French supply chain is considering how to respond to the circumstances; the over-arching consideration is to comply with the law while maintaining consumer safety. The more significant issue is that in following any course of action there is a legal imperative to use materials approved by the regulatory authorities - but France of course no longer appears to respect these processes.

6. How difficult is it to take BPA out of the packaging process?

Every potential alternative, including each process, product and material, needs to be tested and approved, and with each there are thousands of variables to be taken into consideration, both in terms of the regulatory framework and different uses. Any change will be extremely difficult.

7. How much will it cost industry?

The repercussions would not be only financial. Instead of developing improved products, manufacturers will be forced to adopt changes which are wholly unnecessary possibly increasing food and packaging waste through the use of other materials which may even shorten a product's shelf-life. This makes it impossible to estimate the ultimate cost.

8. Is there still some hope that the French decision will be reversed or delayed?

It is difficult to predict but we do believe the European Commission should take action to ensure that the high levels of consumer protection and a harmonised European market are maintained.

The opinion of the European Food Safety Authority, which is again reviewing hundreds of international studies, will be given at the end of the year and should provide the platform for an EU decision that would be applied consistently throughout Europe

9. If, once again, the EFSA reports at the end of the year that BPA at current levels in packaging is safe, will that affect the way the industry is responding to the French suspension?

The food supply chain needs to prepare a long time in advance of products appearing on the shelves. Whilst we await the EFSA opinion, the initial published findings support previous study reviews saying that BPA as used in food packaging is safe for all consumers. Industry will continue to ensure that products sold in France are safe for the consumer and comply with the law.

10. What are the broader implications for industry of the French action?

France, as an EU Member State, is one of the architects of European food safety legislation which has been created and developed over many decades at enormous public expense. To take an extreme action at the same time it is committed to implementing EU legislation does little to instil confidence in industry to invest.

The credibility of European legislation in this field is now seriously in question - if we are to maintain a harmonised market the EU must encourage all Member States to support existing risk assessment and risk management procedures to assure the health and well-being of its citizens.

2nd September 2014