RECYCLING COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

FACTSHEET SERIES

APRIL 2008

PLASTICS AND BPA

What is Bisphenol A?

Bisphenol A, also known as BPA, is a chemical used in the production of polycarbonate plastics and is found in many household products such as water bottles, electronics, CDs and as a liner in some metal cans. Polycarbonate plastics are usually labeled with the recycling symbol of three arrows with a number 7 in the middle.

Health Concerns

Concerns have arisen about the safety of bisphenol A because it is known to mimic estrogen and other hormones. Some studies show that exposure to BPA can lead to early-onset puberty and prostate, ovarian and breast cancer cell growth.

It is important to note that effects of BPA are only theoretical as studies are based upon animal and laboratory experiments and as of yet there is no evidence that BPA has caused any harm to humans.

How are humans exposed to Bisphenol A?

BPA leaches out of plastic containers into foods, especially when heated. Foods that contain high levels of fats, such as fish, and acids such as canned tomatoes, will break down plastics containing BPA more readily.

While water bottles have been at the forefront of growing public concern around BPA plastics, many people are unaware that most metal food containers are lined with plastic containing BPA. Metal containers are heated during the canning process and often sit for long periods of time before they are used, making them far more likely to have leached BPA into the food they contain.

Most Canadians are not exposed to doses of BPA that pose a risk. The main concern is for newborns and infants who are more susceptible to the effects of toxins and are exposed through heated plastic bottles and canned infant formula.

What is being done?

The Government of Canada announced that they will be banning the importation, sale and advertising of polycarbonate baby bottles. Canada will be the first country in the world to designate bisphenol A toxic to human health and the environment.

Many retailers have voluntarily removed products containing BPA from their shelves. Mountain Equipment Co-op was the first to pull the products, and many have followed: Wal-Mart Canada, Canadian Tire, Hudson's Bay Co., Sears Canada, Rexall Pharmacies, London Drugs and Home Depot Canada have all removed plastic baby bottles and water bottles.

What can I do?

According to Health Canada most household plastics such as tableware and water bottles do not pose a health risk to the general population as the amount of BPA that leaches into foods at room temperature is minimal.

If you are concerned about BPA leaching into foods there are many alternatives to plastics containing BPA.

- Glass baby bottles are readily available, as are metal water bottles or plastic containers that do not contain BPA.
- Items like cutlery and cutting boards can be made of wood or bamboo which make a sustainable alternative to plastic.
- Look for plastics that are labeled with the recycling symbol with a number 1, 2, 4 or 5 in the middle. While these plastics may also leach chemicals, studies suggest that their level of toxicity is not as great as with other plastic products.
- Avoid microwaving plastic containers or putting any hot foods or liquids into them as the heat will increase the probability of leaching chemicals. Instead use oven-proof glass or ceramic dishes.
- Ask for butcher's paper instead of plastic at the deli, or better yet, bring your own containers.

Where to recycle these plastics in the Lower Mainland:

Happy Stan's Recycling
1603 Langan Ave. Port Coquitlam
604-464-0242

Pacific Mobile Depots
North Vancouver
www.pacificmobiledepots.com

BTR Recycling
604-237-7889
Delta

Wastech Transfer Stations
604-521-1715
www.wastech.ca

- North Vancouver – 30 Riverside Dr.
- Surrey – 9770 192nd St.
- Coquitlam – 1200 United Blvd.
- Abbotsford – 33621 Valley Rd.

For recycling options outside the Lower Mainland, please call 1-800-667-4321

For more information contact the Recycling Council of BC:

Recycling Hotline—604-732-9253 or 1-800-667-4321
or
hotline@rcbc.bc.ca

Sources

Government of Canada: http://www.chemicalsubstanceschimiques.gc.ca/faq/bisphenol_a_qa-qr_e.html#2
Health Canada: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/nr-cp/2008/2008_59_e.html
CBC: http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/04/15/bisphenol.html
http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourinterview/2008/04/bisphenol_a.html
http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/health/bisphenol-a.html
Environmental Defense: http://www.environmentaldefence.ca/toxicnation/action/bisphenolfaq.htm