

FDA: Controversial chemical in plastics is safe

August 15, 2008

Story Highlights

- * Bisphenol A is used to seal canned food and make shatterproof bottles
- * It also used in hundreds of household items, ranging from sunglasses to CDs
- * Several states are considering bills to restrict use of the chemical
- * More than 6 million pounds of bisphenol A are produced in the U.S. each year

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Despite ongoing safety concerns from parents, consumer groups and politicians, a chemical used in baby bottles, canned food and other items is not dangerous, federal regulators said Friday.

Food and Drug Administration scientists said the trace amounts of bisphenol A that leach out of food containers are not a threat to infants or adults. The plastic-hardening chemical is used to seal canned food and make shatterproof bottles. It is also used in hundreds of household items, ranging from sunglasses to CDs.

The FDA's draft report was greeted with enthusiasm by the American Chemistry Council, which has defended the chemical's safety.

"FDA is the government agency we rely upon to assess food-contact products. They've assessed this issue in great detail and their conclusion is very reassuring," said Steve Henges, an executive director with the council.

But environmental groups were quick to criticize the agency's conclusions, which they said relied on industry-funded studies.

"It's ironic FDA would choose to ignore dozens of studies funded by [the National Institutes of Health] -- this country's best scientists -- and instead rely on flawed studies from industry," said Pete Myers, chief scientist for Environmental Health Sciences.

The FDA report is the latest in a growing pile of assessments of bisphenol, which has been used to package food for decades.

The agency previously declared the chemical safe but agreed to revisit that opinion after a report by the federal National Toxicology Program said there was "some concern" about its risks in infants.

Based on a review of animal studies, the government working group said bisphenol can cause changes in behavior and the brain, and that it may reduce survival and birth weight in fetuses.

About 93 percent of Americans have traces of bisphenol in their urine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the FDA's report concludes that those levels are thousands of times below what would actually be dangerous to adults or children.



Nalgene brand water bottles are made with the chemical bisphenol A, which the FDA has declared safe.

The FDA released its preliminary re-evaluation ahead of a September meeting at which outside advisers will debate the chemical's safety.

Many lawmakers at home and abroad aren't waiting for the agency to complete its review.

Canada has announced its intention to ban the use of the chemical in baby bottles, and U.S. lawmakers have introduced legislation to ban bisphenol in children's products.

California, New Jersey and at least 10 other states also are considering bills to restrict use of the chemical.

More than 6 million pounds of bisphenol are produced in the U.S. each year by Dow Chemical, BASF, Bayer AG and other manufacturers.