



PRESS RELEASE

Europe should act on BPA following health cost-tag calculation

Brussels, 22 January 2014 – The European Union should phase out the use of bisphenol A (BPA) in food contact materials following the publication of first-ever estimates of associated health costs published today, says Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

A US study published in *Health Affairs* (1) says that removing BPA from 'food uses' might prevent 6,236 cases of childhood obesity and 22,350 cases of newly incident coronary heart disease per year in the US, with potential annual economic benefits of US\$1.74 billion (€1.28 billion). (2)

BPA is a chemical used in the production of polycarbonate plastics and the linings of aluminium food and drink cans. It is widely considered to have endocrine disrupting effects but has not yet been officially classified as such in the European chemicals classification system.

The study draws on a health costs study from 2008 on BPA and on new US approaches to "dose-response" calculations.(1) The actual health costs associated with BPA may be even greater, as this study only included obesity and coronary heart disease linked with exposure to food contact materials. BPA is a chemical that is produced at above a million tons per annum globally, and is used in a wide variety of applications, including pesticides and consumer plastics. (3)

Evidence has been mounting that BPA may have adverse health consequences for reproduction, the nervous system, the immune system, and for cancer risks (e.g. breast cancer), as well as for the metabolic and cardiovascular systems. Both the European Commission and the US have banned BPA from baby bottles but they have not taken regulatory action on other food contact materials—that is, uses in food and beverage containers.

The authors of the new study say that although more data are needed, these potentially large health and economic benefits could outweigh the costs of using a safer substitute for BPA.

HEAL believes that this new study should prompt a re-think by the European Commission across all the different legal regimes governing BPA use (such as REACH, Food Contact Materials, and Pesticides).

The EU is currently trying to decide how to regulate hormone disruptors, and BPA is one of the major chemicals of concern," says Géron K. Jensen, Executive Director of HEAL. "This study is exactly the kind of analysis we want to see in the upcoming impact assessment on EDC criteria, as we need to have a comprehensive assessment of the health benefits. While the planned impact assessment is nominally about pesticides, we know that peoples' exposure to hormone disrupting chemicals come from multiple sources and can add up in their bodies to produce harmful effects. So costs of health impacts from different sources are relevant."

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has just launched a public consultation on the basis of its recently completed draft assessment of human health risks of exposure to BPA. (4) The draft assessment concludes that possible effects on reproductive, nervous, immune, metabolic and cardiovascular systems, as well as in the development of cancer are unlikely.

HEAL member in France, Réseau Environnement Santé (RES) responded that although EFSA has revised the daily tolerable exposure level downward, it continues to deny most of the published scientific research on BPA.

"Ninety-five per cent of 900 published studies on the toxicity of bisphenol A show positive results," says André Cicoella, toxicologist and president of RES. "While EFSA acknowledges the emergence of new evidence of the effects of BPA on reproduction, metabolism, immune and cardiovascular effects and neuro-developmental system, with a sleight of hand, these effects are not identified as relevant."(5)

HEAL and other health and environment groups, such as CHEM Trust in the UK, are concerned that during this time of economic recession, regulatory bodies are taking a short-term economic view and are not willing to impose regulatory costs on industry.

"This is a blinkered approach because, if all the potential health gains from tighter regulation of BPA were taken into account, costs to industry would likely be outstripped by the potential health-care savings," says Elizabeth Salter Green of CHEM Trust.

It is the 'true' and total costs of society's exposure to BPA and other hormone disrupting chemicals that need to be considered during decisions on regulation, she adds.

HEAL is part of a coalition of health and environment groups, known as EDC-Free Europe (6), which advocates for health, social and economic advantages as a whole to be fully considered in the EU decisions on regulatory measures for EDCs. This would put the investment costs for some companies to develop and use safer substitutes into a broader societal perspective.

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Notes

1. The paper, "Further limiting bisphenol A in food uses could provide health and economic benefits," published online in *Health Affairs* on January 22:

<http://content.healthaffairs.org/lookup/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0686>

The study takes a 2008 assessment which showed that BPA exposure was estimated to be associated with 12,404 cases of childhood obesity and 33,863 cases of newly incident coronary heart disease, with estimated social costs of \$2.98 billion.

2. The sensitivity analysis shows a range \$889 million–\$13.8 billion per year

3. Although food is a major source of BPA exposure, dental sealants and thermal copy paper are also sources of exposure.

4. European Food Safety Authority (EFSA): [Bisphenol A: EFSA consults on assessment of risk to the human health](#)
5. Press Release, Réseau Environnement Sante, 17 January 2014 <http://reseau-environnement-sante.fr/>
6. EDC-Free Europe is a coalition of public interest groups representing more than 31 organisations across Europe that has come together through a concern about endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and efforts to raise public awareness and urge quicker governmental action. More at: www.edc-free-europe.org

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of its more than 65 member organizations, which represent health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations as well as national and local groups. Website: www.env-health.org