

Recently, the German Food Safety Agency, the BfR (Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung) has taken an interest in diisobutyl phthalate (DIBP). This opens a new important issue for our industry with consequences for all our members.

1. Technical background

DIBP is a component of adhesives (predominately in PVA and hot melt adhesives) used during the manufacture of laminated and corrugated board. Its presence is increasing because it is used as a substitute for a similar substance, di-n-butyl phthalate (DNBP), which has been the subject of a number of health concerns.

The 4th amendment to the EU Plastics Directive has now set a new specific migration limit (SML) for DNBP (0.3 mg/kg food = 0.05 mg/dm² paper).

The problem is that the BfR has taken the view that the limit for DIBP should be based on the new DNBP limit. Both substances are found in recycled packaging papers and the levels of DIBP now exceed, by a wide margin, the new limit for DNBP.

The existing limit for DIBP is a tolerable daily intake set in the synoptic document (version from 2005) which is 0.05 mg/kg bw = 3 mg/kg food = 0.5 mg/dm² paper. However the view of BfR is that this "old" limit is not based on scientific evidence and therefore they want to use the DNBP limit as basis for DIBP.

The new limit proposed by the BfR is set at 1 mg per kg of food (= 0.167 mg/dm² paper), with an even more stringent limit for baby food (0.5 mg per kg of food = 0.083 mg/dm² paper).

2. Political implications

It is clear that this is not just a German problem given the fact that the BfR limits are widely used throughout the European food contact sector as de facto standards. This means that food producers operating on a European wide scale will be asking for paper packaging to fulfil the BfR standards.

Furthermore, the European Commission also seems to be particularly concerned about phthalates, which means that there is pressure building up to stop the use of these substances in Europe.

In order to be able to achieve the strict limit set by the BfR it is essential as an industry to eliminate all European sources of phthalates in the recovered paper stream. This means that not only manufacturers of food contact applications should take action, but also non food contact applications should change to adhesives that are free of phthalates.

3. Call for action

FEFCO therefore urges you as national associations and/or your member companies to start discussions with your adhesives suppliers to phase out the use of these phthalates. Please be so kind to keep us updated on the action you have taken or will be taking and to inform us about any further developments.

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