

Mineral Oils and Food Contact Paper Packaging



Studies on mineral oil hydrocarbons found in foodstuffs have raised questions about consumer safety. According to these studies, traces of mineral oils are thought to migrate to food from inks present both on the printed surface of packaging and in recycled fibre used in the production of packaging papers. The paper-based packaging chain takes this matter very seriously and is being proactive, having long since declared a voluntary commitment (as early as December 2011) to phase out materials containing mineral oils in their production processes, as well as working with the supply chain to reduce them.

The UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) has stated that it does not consider that the current levels of mineral oils in food packaging present a significant food safety concern for consumers. In a study, it concluded that a risk assessment did not identify any specific food safety concerns and that “there is no need for consumers to change their eating habits” with respect to food that has been packaged in paper and board packaging using either primary or recycled fibre.

The German Federal Risk Assessment Authority (BfR), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and many food packaging companies are investigating the situation throughout the value chain. The paper-based packaging chain has submitted to EFSA and BfR a literature review on the previous studies on mineral oil hydrocarbons in printing inks, as well as the results of recent toxicological assays, which, like the FSA study, lead to the same conclusion: no toxic effects were detected from mineral oils used in printing inks.

Even still, it is recognised that mineral oil migration into food is undesirable and eliminating the root cause is the most sustainable option. This can be done by phasing out the use of mineral oil-based printing inks and chemicals in both packaging and printed papers. Such technology changes will take time. As a start, the packaging supply chain companies are making commitments to use only mineral oil-free inks for printing their packaging and, wherever possible, using recovered paper types with minimal content of mineral oils or using primary fibre which does not contain mineral oils.

The paper packaging value chain is very committed to play its part in bringing solutions to this issue. The European paper-based packaging industry has been a pioneer in developing and setting the standards for food contact paper-based packaging¹ together with measures to ensure that the standards are met. These standards form a quality management system to minimise any incidents and to take corrective measures as science develops. This approach is considered to be best practice by the authorities and will continue to be applied when designing packaging in its entirety.

CPI Position:

We treat consumer protection as the highest priority, while at the same time respecting sustainability and advancing the recycling economy, in order to pursue the objective of providing safe food packaging. Paper and Board has a long and successful history of safe use in the food industry in a wide range of applications. The sector has co-operated over a long period of time with government, both at national and European level, and with other regulators to ensure necessary levels of consumer protection.

CPI supports the Industry Guideline for the Compliance of Paper & Board Materials and Articles for Food Contact, which provides a methodology for establishing the suitability of Paper and Board for specific food contact applications. It is envisaged that this Guideline could form the basis of an EU specific legislative measure in the future.

Preserving the integrity of the current recycling chain is very important as the high levels of paper and board recycling, supported by the input of primary fibres from a renewable resource, are a leading example of resource efficiency and good environmental performance.

Further Information

Further information is available from Andy Barnetson, Director of Packaging Affairs, on 01793 889602 or email abarnetson@paper.org.uk.

Confederation of Paper Industries

- The Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) is the leading trade association representing the UK's Paper-based Industries, comprising paper and board manufacturers and converters, corrugated packaging producers, makers of soft tissue papers and collectors of paper for recycling.
- CPI represents an industry with an aggregate annual turnover of £12 billion, 62,000 employees, which supports a further 100,000 jobs in the wider economy.
- For facts on the UK's Paper-based Industries please visit: www.paper.org.uk.

¹Industry Guideline for the Compliance of Paper and Board Materials and Articles for Food Contact by CEPI and CITPA, 2010, and Good Manufacturing Practice for the Manufacture of Paper and Board for Food Contact by CEPI, 2010
<https://paper.org.uk/CPI/Information/Publications/CPI/Content/Information/Publications.aspx>

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