

Recalls & Safety Alerts

A new focus on plastic ingredient in bottles and cans

You may never have heard of a chemical called bisphenol A (BPA), but odds are it's circulating in your body. It was in 93 percent of 2,517 Americans age 6 and over, tested by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a study that was recently released.

How much exposure is acceptable is at the heart of a new debate over BPA, which is used in the manufacture of polycarbonate plastics, such as clear, hard water bottles and baby bottles. The chemical is also used in the making of resin coatings for the linings of cans.

INDUSTRY INFLUENCE

A new report is expected by summer from the U.S. National Toxicology Program, and a congressional committee inquiry is under way into risks of BPA in canned infant formula and how much influence the plastics industry has had over previous research and conclusions.

With widespread use in cans and many plastic containers, the chemical enters the body when it leaches from those containers into food and beverages, although usually at very low levels. That can happen especially when products are heated.

Whether this exposure poses significant risks to human health has been hotly debated. Steven Hentges of the American Chemistry Council, an industry trade group, takes the position that "the weight of scientific evidence clearly supports the safety of BPA."

The current daily upper limit of BPA that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calculates is safe is 50 micrograms per kilogram of body weight, but that standard is based on experiments conducted in the 1980s, before a flood of new studies emerged suggesting that

serious health risks could result from much lower doses based on experiments in laboratory animals and in human cells. Some studies showed adverse health effects from exposures of only 0.025 microgram per kilogram of body weight per day, yet a polycarbonate bottle with

room-temperature water can leach 2 micrograms of BPA per liter. A 3-month-old baby drinking formula from a polycarbonate bottle may be exposed to as much as 11 micrograms per kilogram of body weight daily.

The European Food Safety Authority recently concluded that the 50-microgram safety standard is sufficient. But a panel of 38 experts from around the world convened by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

disagreed. Their review of hundreds of studies over the past decade suggested a connection between exposure to BPA at levels typical in the U.S. and increased rates of breast and prostate cancer, reproductive system abnormalities, and, for exposure in the womb, problems such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obesity, and diabetes.

The report says people in developed countries typically have "measurable blood, tissue, and urine levels of BPA that exceed the levels produced by doses used in the 'low-dose' animal experiments." Infants and fetuses may be especially vulnerable to any health effects from BPA, according to John Bucher, Ph.D., associate director of the NIH's National Toxicology Program. The program is re-evaluating all scientific data on BPA to issue a final report for peer review in June. Canadian health authorities are also conducting a review.

The U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce is looking into the

safety of infant formula cans lined with products containing BPA and is examining whether the proponents of BPA have paid consulting groups to engineer science that reaches predetermined conclusions. A 2006 review published in the peer-reviewed journal *Environmental Research* showed that of 119 government-funded studies conducted as of July 2005, 109 found harmful effects from low-dose exposure in animals. By contrast, 11 industry-funded studies said that BPA causes no harm.

When CONSUMER REPORTS asked the Food and Drug Administration what studies it reviewed to justify its recent statement that "studies do not indicate a safety concern at the current exposure level" for infants or adults exposed to BPA in the lining of food and beverage cans, the two studies cited in the agency's response were conducted by the chemical industry.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

While studies are under way, if you're concerned, here's what you can do:

- Identify which containers might have the chemical. Polycarbonate is usually clear rather than cloudy, although it may be colored. If the container carries a



BPA The chemical bisphenol A is used in clear plastics like the bottle at left, but not in opaque plastics.

our independence matters to you

Did you know that **CONSUMER REPORTS accepts no paid advertising**? In fact, unlike our competitors, CONSUMER REPORTS accepts **no free samples** of the products it reviews, no free trips, no free lodging, **no freebies at all**. We insist on **testing the models you would actually buy** so that we can tell you what you'll actually get. CR is published by **Consumers Union**, an independent, nonprofit research and testing organization. CONSUMER REPORTS is **impartial, unbiased, and expert**. We have more than 50 testing labs, a 327-acre auto-test center, more than 135 highly trained researchers and technicians, and more than 100 experienced reporting and editorial staff. All **independent**. All dedicated only to you.

Your Letters

recycling code, it will be marked with the number 7 or the letters "PC," or both. No. 7 bottles made with BPA-free polyethersulfone (PES) won't have the PC marking. Other BPA-free plastic alternatives include polyethylene, which may be marked with recycling codes 1 (PET) or 2 (HDPE), and polypropylene, 5 (PP).

- For baby bottles, glass or BPA-free plastics such as polyethylene are the safest choices, as CONSUMER REPORTS has advised in the past.
- For those who reuse water bottles frequently and want to avoid BPA, consider polyethylene, stainless steel, or aluminum with BPA-free liners.

AUTOMOBILES

Ford Expedition/Lincoln Navigator

Door handle housing embossment might fracture during normal use. The handle might not return to the fully closed position, and in a side-impact crash the interior door handle might cause door latch to open, increasing risk of injury to occupant.

Models: 123,632 Expeditions and Navigators ('07-'08).

What to do: Dealer will replace interior door handle spring on all side doors. Call Ford at 800-392-3673.

CHILDREN'S PRODUCTS

Evenflo car seats/travel systems

In a side-impact crash, car seat could separate from its base, risking serious injury or death.

Products: 1,000,000 Discovery car seats or travel systems manufactured from 4/05 through 1/08, models 390, 391, 534, and 552.

What to do: Evenflo will send registered owners a free supplemental dual-hook fastener. To get the free fastener, call 800-356-2229 or go to www.evenflo.com.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Crafters Square hot melt mini glue guns

Guns can short-circuit, smoke, and catch fire, posing risk of burn and electric shock.

Products: 253,000 glue guns sold at Dollar Tree and other dollar stores nationwide from 2/07 through 8/07 for about \$1. Dollar Tree has had seven reports of short-circuited guns, with two injuries.

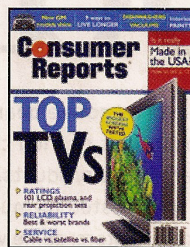
What to do: Return gun for refund. Call 800-876-8077 or go to www.dollartree.com for details.

FOR SAFETY ALERTS and to report a dangerous product to any of the six federal agencies that oversee consumer safety, go to www.recalls.gov. You can also report dangers by phone. For vehicles, call 888-327-4236; for household products, call 800-638-2772, then press 1, then 3. We want to hear your concerns, too. Go to www.ConsumerReports.org and click on "Report a product-safety problem" under the Consumer Interest area.

GOING DIGITAL

Thanks for your March 2008 article "Are You Set for All-Digital TV?" We have an HDTV and get great reception via antenna. What equipment will we need to record TV shows after the switchover? We don't care to pay for TV service (cable or dish) or for DVR service, and I'm assuming our VCR won't work.

CHRISTINE LAWTON VANCOUVER, WA



To record digital programming received via antenna in standard definition without paying fees, you can buy a digital-to-analog converter box (\$40 to \$70, less a \$40 coupon you can request from the government), connect the antenna wire to the box, and run a cable from the box to the VCR, with an output to the TV. Or buy a DVD recorder with a built-in ATSC tuner and attach the antenna wire to the recorder, with an output to the TV. The only practical way to record full-quality high-def programming free is to buy a JVC Digital VHS tape recorder with a built-in ATSC tuner.

FLIGHT FRIGHT

Congratulations on your February article "Air Security." However, you failed to mention one important security issue. When reinforced cockpit doors were mandated, the pilots were isolated and depended on an oral report of danger from the crew. A threatened or excited crew member could provide a less than accurate report.

This problem was recognized by several countries as a serious security breach, and cameras in the passenger area with monitors in the cockpit were mandated. But in the U.S., the Federal Aviation Administration rule on the issue was almost comical: The FAA has said that the peephole in the cockpit door was adequate. The pilot is responsible for the safety of the passengers and the aircraft,

and certainly can't see enough through a peephole to make an assessment of a security issue. As one pilot is quoted as saying, "The clock is ticking."

DARYL F. GATES, CHIEF,
LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT, RET.
CITY OF INDUSTRY, CA

PATIENT, HEAL THYSELF

As a pediatrician, I agree that illness prevention is key to health-care reform ("Six Prescriptions for Change," March). And primary-care physicians, we who work intensively to educate patients about illness prevention, are among the most poorly paid of physicians.

However, I disagree that it is the job of primary-care physicians to prevent and control lifestyle-related illnesses such as those associated with obesity and smoking. We are all responsible for the decisions we make regarding risk-taking behaviors, and doctors suffer the frustration of educating and working with patients for whom we care deeply but cannot help because they cannot or will not help themselves.

DOLORES C. LEONARD, M.D. EAST AMHERST, NY

RETIRE RIGHT

I think you missed the point on item No. 2 of "12 Money Mistakes" (February). The one thing you can't buy is extra time to enjoy life. My wife and I retired early, at age 50. Sure, we took a big hit in the money world, but you would be surprised how little it takes to live well if your ego doesn't require a fancy car or huge house.

BERNARD MURPHY LAFAYETTE, AL

CORRECTION

Due to a production error, two car models were incorrectly listed in Best & Worst (April). The Honda Civic EX (31 mpg) should have been listed under "Most miles per gallon" for Small Cars. The Chrysler 300C (16 mpg) should have been listed under "Fewest miles per gallon" for midsized and large sedans.