

BfR supports ban on triclosan in food contact materials

BfR Opinion No. 031/2009, 12 June 2009

Triclosan is an anti-bacterial active substance that is mainly used in cosmetic care products but also in clothing, cleaning agents and in various plastics that come into contact with food. From 2010 onwards substances which are to be used as additives in food contact plastics must be expressly approved for that purpose within the EU. This prompted the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) to examine whether the use of triclosan is likely to lead to a health risk for consumers.

According to BfR, which bases its evaluation on a safety assessment of the Scientific Committee on Consumer Products (SCCP), consumers may already be at risk from the widespread use of triclosan in cosmetics. The margin of exposure defined as sufficiently safe of 100 between the highest level of the substance which had no effect in animal experiments and the amount deemed to be safe for humans is not complied with under certain circumstances. As a consequence of the migration of triclosan from plastic materials to food, consumers ingested additional amounts of the biocide. Hence BfR is of the opinion that further exposure routes should be avoided and triclosan should not be approved as a food additive.

Besides the toxicological aspects there has been no definitive clarification so far of the role played by the widespread use of triclosan in the emergence and spread of resistances. Triclosan is often present in very low concentrations and it is used although it does not offer any hygiene advantages that could not be achieved with conventional cleaning agents. For that reason BfR is of the opinion that the use of triclosan should be reduced to the absolutely necessary minimum.

Against this backdrop BfR recommends that the use of triclosan in food contact plastic materials should not be permitted within the framework of the Consumer Goods Ordinance.

The full version of the BfR Opinion in German is available on http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/216/bfr_unterstuetzt_verwendungsverbot_von_triclosan_in_lebensmittelbedarfsgegenstaenden.pdf