

Thermal Receipts: BPA & BPS

Two industrial chemicals found on items that people handle every day, pose a serious concern for workers and consumers alike.

The chemicals are Bisphenol A (BPA) and Bisphenol S (BPS).

These chemicals are found on thermal paper used as receipts at grocery stores, restaurants and retail stores, movie tickets, airline boarding passes and more.



BPA is one of the most widely used chemicals in the world. Polycarbonate plastics like water bottles, food storage containers, tableware, plus the resin lining of food and beverage containers, can all contain BPA.

Canada became the first country to ban the import and sale of polycarbonate baby bottles containing BPA in 2008. Then, in 2010, the Federal government added BPA to its toxic substance list.

But, in March 2016, Environmental Defence Canada, along with five other non-profits, released a study called “Buyers Beware: Toxic BPA & Regret-

table Substitutes in the Linings of Canned Food.”¹ That study revealed that “67% of cans tested contained BPA-based epoxy in the can lining.”

Why is BPA bad?

BPA is a man-made chemical that acts as an endocrine disruptor. It interferes with natural hormone balance and function. Endocrine disruptors turn on, shut off, or modify signals that hormones carry.

This affects the normal functions of tissues and organs in the body. Also, low doses of BPA have been found to impact fetal development and may contribute to reproductive damage.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has a fact sheet on Endocrine Disruptors available at: bit.ly/EndocrineDisrupt

The public was led to believe that “BPA-free” products were safe. Unfortunately, this isn’t necessarily true. The chemical used commonly to replace BPA is BPS. But, the chemical structure of BPS is similar to BPA and there are indications that it may have similar worrying health effects.

- BPA and BPS transfer readily to anything touching the paper, including skin.
- Skin absorbs the chemicals even if only handling a receipt briefly.
- This leads to significant absorption of BPA and BPS into the body.
- The absorption increases when hands are moist or greasy.
- Using hand sanitizer or lotion causes the chemicals to absorb more rapidly through the skin.

As workers and consumers, what can we do to minimize our exposure?

A recent study² suggests workers who handle thermal paper should wear disposable gloves when tearing receipts, changing receipt rolls or cleaning machines.

The same study found that 93% of the receipts they tested contained BPS or BPA.

A Health Canada report³ released in August 2017, found BPA present in 92.7% of blood samples taken from 5,700 Canadians in 2014 and 2015.

Some employers do have policies that provide employees with vinyl gloves upon request. Metro and Food Basics stores use BPA-Free thermal receipt paper already. Metro's Health & Safety Director confirmed that the company's Safe Work Practice - Parceling Merchandise program permits the use of vinyl gloves at the cash.

Currently, Loblaw Companies stores use BPA-free thermal receipt paper as well. While Loblaw Companies does not have a policy for wearing gloves, at a meeting with the Union's Health & Safety Representative Mary Shaw, the company confirmed that an employee requesting vinyl gloves would be provided with them.

Sources:

1 Environmental Defence (2016). Buyers Beware: Toxic BPA & Regrettable Substitutes in the Linings of Canned Food. (n.d.). Retrieved August 24, 2018, from <https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/buyers-beware-toxic-bpa-regrettable-substitutes-in-the-linings-of-canned-food/>

2 (2018, January 17). Receipt Paper Study 2018. <https://www.ecocenter.org/healthy-stuff/reports/receipt-paper-study-2018>

3 Health Canada (2017, August 23). Fourth Report on Human Biomonitoring of Environmental Chemicals in Canada. Retrieved August 24, 2018, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/environmental-workplace-health/reports-publications/environmental-contaminants/fourth-report-human-biomonitoring-environmental-chemicals-canada>



When out shopping, or if you work at a store or establishment that uses receipts, ask the management what type they use.

As consumers, we can encourage businesses to switch to a less hazardous paper. New types of thermal papers do not contain BPA or BPS. The new paper, which is approved for food contact, is phenol-free with a coating that does not come off like BPA and BPS. Also, if a store offers to email your receipt, take that option to avoid the printed version.

If you're a Union Member who is concerned about whether your employer uses BPA-free thermal paper, speak to your employer or Health & Safety Committee.

You can also contact your Union Representative or the Union's Health & Safety Department.

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