

6 firms stop sales of hard-plastic baby bottles

Contributed by Jane Kay
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Bending to growing public and legal pressure that began in San Francisco, California, six major companies have agreed to stop selling hard-plastic baby bottles containing bisphenol A, an industrial chemical suspected of harming human development.

The purveyors of baby-care products -- Playtex Products Inc., Gerber, Evenflo Co., Avent America Inc., Dr. Brown and Disney First Years -- said they no longer will market the shatter-proof polycarbonate bottles and some other baby products in the United States.

Polycarbonate is made of bisphenol A, widely used in hundreds of commercial applications, including the inside lining of metal food and drink containers, epoxy resins and polyvinyl chloride plastics.

Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, in announcing the companies' decisions on Thursday, said he and the attorney generals from Delaware and New Jersey had written to the companies last year, urging them to stop using the chemical, which mimics the hormonal activity of estrogen and can alter the normal workings of genes.

Health officials cautious about possible ill effects believe that infants and children are at the greatest risk because of their quickly developing bodies and sensitive systems.

Shannon Jenest, a spokeswoman for Avent, which is owned by the Philips Group, said its polycarbonate products have met governmental guidelines, including those set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which has not banned bisphenol A.

Philips made the decision to stop shipping polycarbonate baby bottles to retailers in the United States, she said, because the company values its relationship with its customers and there is "current confusion about the use of bisphenol A in infant feeding products."

The company will continue to sell polycarbonate baby bottles elsewhere in the world, she said.

Because of pressure from consumer rights groups and a move toward toxics-free products, some of the companies have been making bisphenol A-free alternatives, including old-fashioned glass baby bottles. Nalgene, a leader in sales of portable drinking water bottles, discontinued its polycarbonate lines last year.

Blumenthal asked Thursday for legislation to further restrict the chemical in baby products.

Last year, Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California was among the authors of the Kid-Safe Chemicals Act, which banned plastic softeners, known as phthalates, from children's products. A bill to expand the law is expected to be introduced in Congress this year to restrict bisphenol A in children's products.

In 2006, San Francisco became the first city to ban bisphenol A in children's products but backed off of the ordinance after chemical manufacturers, toymakers and a local retailer, Citikids Baby News, challenged it in court. San Francisco supervisors said at the time that the law was difficult to enforce without similar state or federal laws.

That year, The Chronicle sent children's products for tests that found bisphenol A in the covers of waterproof children's books, a baby rattle, the face of a doll, a plastic pony and some baby bottles.

Last week, state Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Los Angeles, introduced a bill limiting the chemical in baby-care products, including its use in the lining of infant formula cans.

"Eliminating bisphenol A from baby bottles is an important first step," Pavley said Thursday. "I hope makers of formula cans and other baby feeding containers follow suit and acknowledge the inherent dangers of (the chemical) to the developing bodies of young children, who now ingest it on a daily basis when it leaches into their food and drink."

The industry has argued that bisphenol A levels in humans were too low to cause damage.

Industry studies found the chemical caused no damage to laboratory animals or humans, but more than 150 government and academic-sponsored studies have found a series of development problems even at low exposures.

Studies in lab animals indicate that even small amounts of bisphenol A can damage brain and reproductive systems, alter mammary and prostate glands and lead to heart disease, obesity and diabetes.

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Bisphenol-A, according to research reported to Culture Change, is able to cause the above diseases plus cancer at doses as low as .1 parts per billion, as we have reported on this website in the past few years.

For articles on the plastic plague and the banning of petroleum bags at super markets, see our Plastic Plague section and obtain the DVD "Our Synthetic Sea" from Algalita Marine Research Foundation (also available in Spanish).