

Q&A: Addressing BPA and Chemicals of Concern amid Regulatory Pressures

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Interview with Iuliana Nita, Global Marketing Manager, Food and Beverage, the Process Systems Business Unit at Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics



The evolving regulatory environment presents many challenges to food and beverage manufacturers. Products intended for human consumption require extra precautions in the selection of materials with which they will come into contact. Additionally, [today's consumers](#) [1] are [more vocal than ever](#) [2], driving the regulation of certain substances, like [bisphenol A \(BPA\)](#) [3], that come into contact with foods and beverages during production. Perception is often the new reality and product manufacturers must proactively address any chemicals of concern to ensure brand integrity and consumer loyalty.

Food Manufacturing sat down with Iuliana Nita of the [Process Systems Business Unit at Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics \(SGPPL\)](#) [4] to discuss the various challenges facing food and beverage manufacturers and reflect on the preemptive measures being taken to address the rising safety concerns surrounding chemicals of concern in the midst of increasing global regulatory pressures.

Q: What challenges must brand owners and manufacturers address when a previously accepted chemical is put under the spotlight by consumers and regulatory agencies?

A: For starters, the evolving regulatory environment is increasingly intricate. This complexity stems from the increasing globalization of the food and beverage sectors, as well as the growing number of food safety regulations across different regions, nations and, in some cases, states. The varying regulations require

additional resources for manufacturers to navigate and ensure compliance, while also guaranteeing product quality and consistency. This means taking a magnifying glass to their production line for a thorough examination of equipment and components that come into contact with their food or beverage product. If they include materials that contain chemicals of concern, the manufacturer must consider alternatives that will fall within the scope of anticipated regulations or else run the risk of being closed out of a market.

Organizations worldwide are working to advance food safety initiatives and instill consumer confidence in the safe manufacture of food. The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), a business-driven collaboration between the world's leading food safety experts, aims to reduce food safety risks, manage global food costs through operational efficiency and build a consistent, effective global food system. GFSI is overseen by the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and provides a global forum for players in food manufacturing, retail and service to address food safety issues and best practices are implemented across the supply chain.

In the United States, following the passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), food manufacturers and importers are required to confirm that the chemicals they are using, manufacturing or importing are approved for use in food, as well as to prevent unapproved usage. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must also be aware of any new research on hazards associated with chemicals and determine whether consumers are experiencing health problems. This data is not always available through FDA studies, inviting confusion over the sometimes conflicting findings of studies from other sources. This confusion adds another challenge: even when a regulation against a chemical has not come to fruition, manufacturers must still address a stigmatized chemical or risk appearing irresponsible to consumers.

With regulations varying around the world, manufacturers must take it upon themselves to protect the integrity of their brands by ensuring the best possible product safety and quality. Proactive steps to anticipate regulations in target markets demonstrate leadership in food safety and promote consumer loyalty. Implementing globally compliant solutions for food processing should be among those steps.



Q: Why have bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates been given so much attention?

A: BPA and phthalates are organic compounds used in a broad range of industries and products, including food and beverage containers, toys, medical devices, childcare items, personal care items and household items.

Voices have risen from the consumer community over concerns regarding the potential effects of low-level exposure to these chemicals.

BPA has been the subject of scrutiny for years, and the FDA's National Center for Toxicological Research continues to carry out [in-depth studies](#) [5] seeking to answer questions and clarify uncertainties about the risks of BPA. Phthalates are often treated as if they were the same compound, but in fact, they are a group of chemicals with similar chemical structure but a unique chemical and toxicological profile.

The health effects of BPA have been studied extensively for years. Interest in BPA stems largely from the chemical's use in many children's products. Additionally, BPA has been characterized as an endocrine disruptor, meaning that it may interfere with normal development of the reproductive system and other hormonally mediated systems. The studies that have linked low-level exposure to BPA and phthalates to diseases, such as diabetes, cancer and obesity have not yet been validated and supported by a widespread national ban in the U.S. and other countries outside of Europe and Canada.

The potential health effects of phthalates are also subject to numerous reviews. Despite the general lack of scientific support for low-level effects of phthalates, their widespread use and possible effects on children created the same spotlight on phthalates as we have seen with BPAs. Legislators responded, with one phthalate in particular — di (2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP) — receiving special attention and making the European Union's REACH candidate list of substances of very high concern (SVHC) and California's OEHHA Proposition 65 List of chemicals of concern.

Whether the concerns are real or exaggerated, the perceived risk and its impact have launched consumer goods manufacturers and their industry regulatory bodies into action with self-regulation. Companies keeping a close eye on potential BPA hazards include [Nestle](#) [6], [Heinz](#) [7], [General Mills](#) [8] and [Hain Celestial](#) [9]. All of these companies are expected to launch BPA-free product lines. Many industries, consumers and governments also are putting limitations on the use of DEHP in certain applications.



Q: How can tubing impact the risk of chemical exposure in food and beverage products?

A: For food and beverage applications, including dispensing and transfer between processing and filling operations, tubing has countless points of direct contact with product meant for human consumption. These products can include sodas, juices, hot drinks, beer and wine, and condiments like ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard, as well as dairy foods like frozen yogurt and ice cream. All of these products may pass through tubing systems as they are packaged or dispensed at the point of sale.

The right tubing solution can help OEMs and brand owners protect the integrity of their operations and products as well as increase productivity and help boost output, support higher food safety and quality standards. Since tubing technologies come into contact with so many processed foods and beverages, it is critical to work with a supplier that possesses a complete understanding of the regulatory environment and industry concerns. The guidance provided by such a supplier helps companies maintain a compliant production line, as well as an informed position and ultimately, peace of mind.

Q: When selecting a tubing solution, what should OEMs and product manufacturers look for?

A: Technologies that help manufacturers meet existing food safety standards and anticipate future regulations also demonstrate to consumers that the brand owner is going above and beyond to deliver a product that they can feel good about.

The most effective course of action for OEMs and brand owners is to specify tubing and other components free of phthalates and BPA. Advances in materials science have yielded innovative materials with various performance properties, resulting in tubing solutions that provide dependable food safety and effective performance.

As part of our company's commitment to sustainability, Saint-Gobain provides bio-based, phthalate-free tubing for food and beverage dispensing and transfer applications. One of our safe, smart and sustainable solution initiatives, this type of product provides high level performance by delivering clarity, product consistency and taste-odor free properties, but with a forward-looking formulation to address the needs of evolving regulatory requirements. Because it is bio-based and phthalate-free, the potential impact of the tubing on human health and the environment is reduced, enabling companies to deliver a more positive consumer experience and a better perception of the brand.

About Saint-Gobain

Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics is a subsidiary of Saint-Gobain, one of the top 100 industrial companies in the world and a leading producer of construction products, flat glass, high-performance materials and packaging. The Process Systems Business Unit of Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics produces critical connections through a broad range of customized material solutions and capabilities to help customers achieve safety, performance and brand assurance in many industries. For more information, visit www.plastics.saint-gobain.com [10].

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