

Canadian retail chain pulls plastic water bottles

Plastic containers taken off shelves over chemical's health concerns

TORONTO - Canada's largest outdoor-goods chain has pulled water bottles and food containers made of polycarbonate plastic from its shelves over worries about the chemical bisphenol A, which has been linked to cancer and reproductive problems in animals.

Vancouver-based Mountain Equipment Co-op became the first major Canadian retailer to stop selling products that contain bisphenol A over fears the chemical can leach from plastic food and water containers.

"Inconclusive science and regulatory uncertainty presently surrounds bisphenol-A (BPA)," the company said in a statement.

"For these reasons, MEC has stopped selling polycarbonate water bottles and food containers until guidance is provided by the Government of Canada on the health risks posed by BPA."

The Canadian co-operative joins U.S.-based Patagonia in dropping the products because of health concerns.

The chemical, which can mimic the effects of the hormone estrogen in cells, has been surrounded by controversy. Some North American researchers and environmentalists have shown it can cause several types of cancer as well as developmental, neural, behavioral and reproductive harm in animals.

Industry says the products are not dangerous, citing studies from government agencies such as the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#) that food and beverage containers manufactured from polycarbonate do not pose a health risk to humans.

"Rarely has a chemical been the subject of such intense scientific testing and scrutiny, and still, important agencies across the globe agree that there is no danger posed to humans from polycarbonate bottles," said Tom Cummins, spokesman for Nalgene and Nunc Brand Products, which manufactures the popular Nalgene polycarbonate water bottles.

Besides hard-plastic water bottles, bisphenol A is also used in some baby bottles and the linings of some food cans, including most major brands of infant formula, according to a study co-released this week by Environmental Defence Canada and the Washington-based Environmental Working Group.

"We have study after study showing that this chemical is toxic,... and there are safe and available alternatives that are affordable," said Aaron Freeman, policy director of Environmental Defence Canada.

Canada's health department declined to comment before it releases preliminary results of a review of the chemical's effects next spring.

"We are looking at as much research as we can to make a very science-based assessment," said Joey Rathwell, a spokeswoman for Health Canada.

Norway and the European Union are also reviewing the product. Japanese manufacturers decided voluntarily to stop making products using polycarbonate plastic five to six years ago. *Reuters 2007.*