

# GREATER PROTECTION AGAINST HARMFUL CHEMICALS FOR CONSUMERS

Food packaging, utensils, crockery and other food contact materials need to be better regulated

Food comes into contact with objects made from all kinds of materials while it is being produced, packed, stored, prepared and eaten. Such objects, known as food contact materials, include food packaging, kitchen utensils and crockery. Theoretically, these materials are covered by legislation and are monitored by supervisory authorities. Food contact materials must not transfer any substances to food in concentrations that could pose a danger to health or could adversely affect the smell or taste of the food.

In practice, however, chemicals that are potentially harmful to health regularly end up in food.

These chemicals create health risks for consumers. Harmful substances have been found in the bodies of children and young people in potentially harmful concentrations. Authorities in charge often lack sufficient personnel or the necessary expertise to deal with the issue and therefore barely analyse this product group at all. There is also a lack of data with which to assess risks and hazards. Safety checks do not work and lag behind the latest scientific findings. The European Commission has therefore announced to propose a new legal framework in 2022.

## A NEW LEGAL FRAMEWORK: VZBV'S POSITION

### ❖ Include a clear ban on particularly harmful substances

The use of particularly risky substances in food contact materials must be prohibited for entire substance groups, regardless of evidence about their transfer to food or the use of a functional barrier. The ban must apply to substances that may cause cancer, genetic changes or reproductive problems and to substances that act as endocrine disruptors.

### ❖ Implement a strict European registration process

More restrictive positive lists need to be drawn up to make it clear to companies and supervisory authorities which chemicals and materials may be used in which product areas and to ensure that people and the environment are protected against chemicals that are harmful to health.

### ❖ Help consumers to use food contact materials safely

Foreseeable and normal use must be the starting point for product designs and hazard assessments. A standardised and comprehensive communication and labelling scheme needs to be developed for food contact materials that includes binding rules on product claims, warnings and usage instructions and on declaring the substances contained in the product.

### ❖ **Prevent products that may potentially be damaging to health from entering the market**

The German government must stop the import of unsafe products that could be damaging to health by imposing import controls and inspections and by introducing its own rules aimed at protecting consumers.

### ❖ **Strengthen monitoring and enforcement**

Supervisory authorities in charge must attach a high priority to the safety of food contact materials. Specialist staffing and technical equipment need to be increased significantly and unsafe products must be taken off the market without delay.

## **EXAMPLES OF FOOD CONTACT MATERIALS THAT MAY POTENTIALLY BE HARMFUL TO HEALTH**

### **Textiles safer than drinking bottles**

Substances that are harmful to health, such as phthalates used to soften plastics, are prohibited in textiles but still allowed to be used in drinking bottles. They can be transferred from the food packaging into the food and accumulate in the body.

### **Coffee cups made from materials that release harmful substances**

Even though they are explicitly sold as coffee cups, travel mugs made from a mixture of plastic and bamboo can release substances that may be harmful to health if they come into contact with hot substances.

### **Mineral oil residue puts the most vulnerable consumers at risk**

Mineral oil residue from metallic containers can be transferred via the packaging to the food, for example powdered milk for babies. It can also be transferred from recycled paper to chocolate.

- [Consumer survey on food contact materials commissioned by vzbv](#)
- [Study on the current EU regulation on food contact materials commissioned by vzbv](#)

### **Contact**

Verbraucherzentrale  
Bundesverband e.V.  
Rudi-Dutschke-Strasse 17  
10969 Berlin  
[www.vzbv.de](http://www.vzbv.de)

Food Policy Team  
[lebensmittel@vzbv.de](mailto:lebensmittel@vzbv.de)