European Commission

Food safety

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How the EU ensures safe food packaging

All packaging materials intended to come into contact with food — including plastic, paper, glass, and metal — must comply with EU safety rules. These rules ensure that packaging does not release substances into food in quantities that could endanger human health; or result in an unacceptable change to the food's composition, taste or smell.

How packaging safety is assessed

The basic EU act, Regulation (EC) 1935/2004, sets general requirements that aim to ensure the safety of materials and articles that come into contact with food which, in addition to safety, include rules on labelling and traceability.

In addition, specific legislation, such as Commission Regulation (EU) 10/2011 on plastic materials and articles sets detailed rules on substances (primarily monomers and additives) used in the manufacture of plastic materials. In this context, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) carries out risk assessments of the chemical substances used in the manufacture of plastic food contact materials.

ADDITIONALLY, THE SPECIFIC LEGISLATION ON PLASTIC MATERIALS AND ARTICLES FURTHER DEFINES:

- **Authorised substances** – only listed substances can be used in food contact materials
- **Conditions of use** – such as intended food types and temperature limits
- **Migration limits** – maximum levels of permitted substance transfer from packaging into food, ensuring exposure remains within safe levels

The assessment of specific substances has resulted in EU legislation that restrict or in some cases, ban certain substances. For example, **bisphenol A (BPA)** is no longer allowed to manufacture food contact materials, including lacquered cans and certain types of plastic.

Manufacturers must also follow good manufacturing practices (GMP), ensuring that food packaging is produced under quality assurance and control systems with appropriate documentation in place to ensure compliance and safety of the finished material or article.

Enforcement

Enforcement of compliance with the legislation is undertaken by Member States. Their competent authorities check the documentation held by FCM producers, visit their premises and collect samples there or on the market to perform laboratory tests. At Member State level, the National Reference Laboratories (NRLs) assist in this task while the European Union Reference Laboratory for Food Contact Materials provides scientific and technical assistance to the NRLs.

Full traceability of packaging materials

EU law requires that all food contact materials are fully traceable throughout their lifecycle — from raw material production to final distribution. This system enables:

- Rapid response to safety concerns
- Targeted recalls or product withdrawals
- More effective enforcement and risk management

When a risk is identified, the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) allows national authorities across the EU to share information and act quickly to protect consumers.

Learn more

Food Contact Materials - European Commission
RASFF - European Commission
EFSA – European Food Safety Authority
Joint Research Centre - EU Reference Laboratory for Food Contact Materials

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