



Bangor Daily News

The consumer game of whack-a-mole with chemical dangers

By [The BDN Editorial Board](#)

Posted April 18, 2016, at 12:58 p.m.

An announcement last month by the Campbell Soup Co. that it would [stop using BPA](#) in the lining of cans containing its soup and other food products again focused attention on the chemical that studies suggest is harmful to humans. [Campbell said it began using an alternative lining in March](#) and would phase out BPA in all its cans by the middle of next year.

This is a welcome announcement, but it inadvertently highlights the shortcomings of U.S. chemical regulations.

In 2011, Maine was hailed as a national leader for passing a law that [banned BPA](#) in some containers. BPA is an [endocrine disruptor](#) that can interfere with the reproductive, immune and developmental systems. [The National Toxicology Program's Center for the Evaluation of Risks to Human Reproduction](#) has "[some concern](#) for effects on the brain, behavior, and prostate gland in fetuses, infants, and children at current human exposures to bisphenol A." "Some concern" is midrange on the program's hierarchy from "negligible" to "serious" concern.

Maine's BPA ban was the first prohibition to stem from the 2008 Kid-Safe Product Act, a state law that directed the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to develop [a list of chemicals](#) used in children's products that were of high concern. BPA, or bisphenol-A, which is used to harden plastics and coat the inside of metal food containers, was the first chemical identified.

Now, it turns out, some of the chemicals used in place of BPA [also are dangerous](#). This highlights a major shortcoming in U.S. policy regarding chemical safety. Essentially, chemicals are presumed safe until they are proven not to be. BPA has been the subject of extensive study. Its alternatives [have not](#).

Comment [NAMPA1]: It would be misleading to not tell your readers that Campbell clearly stated that this switch was because of consumer interest, not any safety concern. Campbell's relies on FDA to make those determinations.

Comment [NAMPA2]: Although correct, this is a 2008 opinion that at the time was shared by US FDA. Since then FDA has re-evaluated the science on BPA and concluded that current uses of BPA are "safe". You might want to update your readers on these developments.

The European Commission, on the other hand, relies on the [precautionary principle](#): If a risk to human health is [suspected](#), then chemicals must be proven not to cause harm before they are approved for use.

Comment [NAMPA3]: You should expand on this because it highlights an important point. Europe does use the Precautionary Principle and they deem current uses of BPA safe and allow most uses. Although if you make this point the rest of the article seems pointless!

“The issues and regulation of BPA and the replacements are the story of the failed chemical safety system,” former House Speaker Hannah Pingree, the lead sponsor of the Kids-Safe Products Act, wrote in an email to the BDN. “We weren’t wrong to try to phase out certain flame retardants or BPA given their health impacts. But that the industry replaces these with chemicals that are equally bad makes the game of whack-a-mole very frustrating.”

Comment [NAMPA4]: Maybe this argument would be stronger if you could point to one person harmed by these “bad” chemicals. Again, FDA, European Food Safety Authority, Health Canada, and others have reviewed BPA and determined current uses as “safe.”

Because of this uncertainty, Pingree wrote that she is “now among the masses of confused and frustrated parents!”

Comment [NAMPA5]: Is it possible that misleading articles like this are what is making parents confused and frustrated?

Without effective federal government oversight, consumers have had to advocate for changes, both in legislative bodies and the marketplace. The day before the Campbell’s announcement, a coalition of health and environmental groups released [a report](#) drawing attention to the prevalence of BPA in food cans. Some of the cans that were tested for the national study were purchased in Maine. More than two-thirds of the cans tested were found to contain BPA. One hundred percent of Campbell cans tested positive for BPA, the report said.

Comment [NAMPA6]: It may be important to inform consumers that ALL food packaging in the US has to be FDA approved for use, and therefore there is federal government oversight. Any new materials that does not use BPA will also need to be approved by FDA for use. This statement when it comes to food packaging is completely misleading.

There are financial incentives for companies that use BPA and its alternatives in their products to leapfrog the process to chemicals that are known to be safer. Rather than switching to untested alternatives only to find in a couple years that they also pose risks to human health, these companies should invest in the research needed to identify safer alternatives and switch to them.

Comment [NAMPA7]: If FDA, EFSA, Health Canada and others say it’s safe and that is not enough assurance to safety, who should companies turn to for that stamp of approval of safety? Maybe you should learn what it takes to get a material approved for use by FDA before making these statements?

Because the risks of BPA are known, ending its use in consumer products makes sense now rather than waiting for testing of its alternatives. At the same time, testing and disclosure of the risks of its alternatives must speed up.

Comment [NAMPA8]: “Because the risks of BPA are known” is a statement of fact that does not consider that it is inconsistent with every Regulatory Agency in the world. You may want to make that “in my uneducated opinion ...”