

Harmful chemicals in Belgian Food Contact Materials

From farms to storage, to processing and grocery shops, our food comes into contact with lots of different materials. Unfortunately, **those materials are allowed to contain harmful chemicals that can leach into the food we eat and the beverages we drink (1), putting our health at risk.**



What have studies shown?

Harmful chemicals, such as phthalates, bisphenols and fluorinated substances (PFAS) can be present in food contact materials and food packaging.

- Analysis of 13 fast-food packaging products bought in Belgium found that **over half were contaminated by fluorinated substances (2).**
- A report on toxic mineral oils (MOAH) in food found **food products from Belgium had been contaminated with MOAH (3).** Contamination of food with MOAH can occur via food contact materials.

Chemicals in our bodies

We are constantly exposed to a cocktail of known and suspected harmful chemicals through air, water, food, consumer products and other routes. Food contact materials can contribute to our exposure to harmful chemicals.

- A biomonitoring study of Belgian adults found an increase in all **bisphenol alternatives** tested for in urine in 2018 compared to 2015 (4).
- **17% of Belgian teenagers** tested have a combined level of exposure to **PFOA, PFOS, PFNA and PFHxS** exceeding the EU Food Safety Authority's health-based guidance value (5).

What are Food Contact Materials (FCMs)?

Materials and products that come into contact with our food, such as storage containers, factory equipment, kitchen utensils, tableware, and food packaging.

88% of Belgian citizens are worried about the impact of chemicals present in everyday products **on the environment (6).**

83% of Belgian citizens are worried about the impact of chemicals present in everyday products **on their health (6).**

Some action has been taken... but not nearly enough

- The Belgian Government voted in support of a resolution stating that the national government should take action if PFAS is not banned in food packaging in the EU by 2023 (7).
- Belgium has set migration limits on varnishings and coatings intended to come into contact with food (8).

However, there is much more to be done in order to properly protect Belgian and EU citizens from harmful chemicals in food contact materials.

Looking forwards

A revision of EU food contact material legislation is underway, presenting a key opportunity to act. We do not merely want to patch the loopholes that allow harmful chemicals in food contact materials. **We are calling for the legislation to be properly updated to ensure the protection of citizen's health, help support a circular economy free from harmful chemicals, and ensure harmful chemicals do not enter the environment. Visit toxicfreefoodpackaging.com for information on actions to take.**

1. Zimmerman et al, 2022. Implementing the EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability: The case of food contact chemicals of concern.

2. BEUC, 2017. New test by European consumer organisations finds toxic substances in fast food packaging.

3. Food Watch, 2021. Toxic mineral oil found in food products.

4. Environmental Research, 2022. Urinary levels of parabens, phthalate metabolites, bisphenol A and plasticizer alternatives in a Belgian population: Time trend or impact of an awareness campaign?

5. HBM4EU, 2022. Final conference exhibition 'We live in a chemical world' – Exposure levels and exceedance values

6. European Union, 2020. Attitudes of Europeans towards the environment - Belgium.

7. Government of Belgium, 2022. Pollution à Zwijndrecht: la Chambre veut l'interdiction des PFAS dans les emballages alimentaires.

8. Chemical Watch, 2016. Belgium passes food contact varnishes and coatings law.

