

WORKING PARTY ON CHEMICAL CONTAMINANTS FROM FOOD CONTACT MATERIALS AND ARTICLES

Minutes of the 36th meeting held on Thursday 29 November 2001, at 11:00 am in Conference Rooms 3 & 4, Aviation House, 125 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NH.

Members Present

Dr D Watson (Chairman)	Food Standards Agency (FSA) Chemical Safety and Toxicology Division (CST)
Mr R Sinclair (Secretariat)	FSA, CST
Dr K Barnes (Secretariat)	FSA, CST
Dr P Willetts (Secretariat)	FSA, CST
Mr E Potter (Secretariat)	FSA, CST
Mr R Ashby	Consultant
Mr N Barnwell	Paper Federation of Great Britain
Mr B Cass	Linpac Plastics
Dr L Castle	Central Science Laboratory
Dr N Gault	Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland
Mr P Grayhurst	British Glass
Mr R Parry	Crest Packaging plc
Mr K Rees	Packaging & Industrial Films Association
Mr E B Reynolds	LACOTS
Dr J Shavila	FSA, CST
Mrs A Townshend	National Federation of Consumer Groups
Mr R Whitaker	Crown Corporate Technologies

1. Chairman's Introduction

- 1.1 The *Chairman* welcomed members to the meeting. He introduced *Dr Karen Barnes* as the new joint Head of the Food Contact Materials Unit. He also introduced *Mr Edward Potter* who is temporarily replacing *Dr Simona Origgi-Fernando* following her move to a new position in the Agency.

1.2 The *Chairman* informed members that the papers and agreed minutes from this meeting would be published on the Agency's website in due course.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1 Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Paul Raynor, Mr John Horwood and Mr John Hewitt.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting (WPFCM/MIN/35)

3.1 The minutes of the 35th meeting were agreed by members and signed by the *Chairman* as a true record of the meeting. These minutes had been included in the Review document published earlier in the year.

4. Matters arising from minutes of the previous meeting

4.1 Further to item 4.1 of WPFCM/MIN/35 the *Chairman* informed members that proposals for new scientific work on food contact materials had been included in the most recent Agency Research Requirements Document, published in late September. These proposals were summarised in Annex II of paper WPFCM/131. The deadline (20th November 2001) for the submission of bids in response to the published requirements had just passed.

4.2 Further to item 4.3 of WPFCM/MIN/35, the *Chairman* also informed members that the composition of the Agency's Board had changed following the resignation of Mr Gurbux Singh. Copies of a booklet giving the Food Standards Agency's Board current membership were available from the side table at this Working Party meeting.

4.3 Further to item 5.3 of WPFCM/MIN/35, the *Chairman* confirmed that the consultation exercise with stakeholders, undertaken following the publication of a Food Surveillance Information Sheet on bisphenols A and F, had been completed on 4th July. A report on the outcome of the consultation and the Agency's current position had been placed on the FSA website.

4.4 The *Chairman* also noted that the Board of the Food Standards Agency had favourably reviewed the work on food contact materials carried out by the Unit, at a meeting towards the end of 2000.

5. FSA policy developments (Mr Sinclair; oral presentation)

5.1 In his presentation on policy for food contact materials in the Agency, *Mr Sinclair* highlighted the key priorities, aims and objectives for the work, referring to the importance of a sound scientific basis. He pointed to the achievements that had been made, for example in legislation on plastics and in the reporting of surveillance. In conclusion, *Mr Sinclair* summarised for members the impending issues to be addressed, noting in particular the prioritisation of future controls for coatings as well as those on paper and board.

5.2 In relation to the enforcement issues that *Mr Sinclair* mentioned, *Mr Ashby* enquired whether the Agency audited inspections carried out by Trading Standards. In reply the *Chairman* confirmed that the Local Authority Enforcement Division of the Agency was doing this. The results of inspections are published. The Agency is in the process of developing an auditing system and those parties interested in this should contact *Mr Sinclair*. *Mr Reynolds* said that vital information was no longer available since quarterly reports from Public Analysts had been discontinued and he noted the duty under European legislation to collate data and enforce controls. *Mr Ashby* similarly expressed concern, questioning whether the actions being taken were achieving their objective. He asked whether random audits were carried out and what samples were taken, suggesting that it could be informative to look at what happens in other countries. *Mr Sinclair* agreed to contact the Local Authority Enforcement Division and come back on these points. The *Chairman* concluded that communication channels on this subject should be kept open.

ACTION: MR SINCLAIR

5.3 *Mr Grayhurst* asked what the term 'coatings' encompassed. *Mr Sinclair* explained that the recent interest of the Agency had been in coatings on cans, but that it was envisaged that controls in this area would involve a far wider range of surface coatings. *Mr Ashby* stated the need to influence the European Commission on this matter. The desirability of including polymeric coatings on metal substrates and on regenerated cellulose films in future controls was emphasised. The *Chairman*

added that, with regard to can coatings, it was difficult to keep everybody on side, noting on-going discussions with the US regarding NOGE. *Mr Sinclair* confirmed, in response to *Mr Whitaker*, that he believed the Commission intended to take forward work on coatings drawn up by the Council of Europe.

5.4 The *Chairman* said that there was an evolving relationship between the Commission and the Council of Europe. It was noted, for example, that the implementation of the Safety Evaluation Scheme proposed by the Council of Europe had been postponed, following the Commission's indication that its own processes for formal safety assessment would still have to be followed. The way in which the Scientific Committee on Food would deal with the issue of coatings remains uncertain.

5.5 The *Chairman* added that the aim of the Commission should be to promote harmonisation of controls and discourage national authorities from taking action on their own. He recognised that there was potential for a North/South European divide occurring over, for example, paper and board regulations. It was also important to look into the legislation on cork and household ceramics, as well as that for plastics and paper and board.

5.6 *Mr Reynolds* added that there was still a need for formal guidance on enforcing the law. The *Chairman* reported that the Agency would be looking into this with regard to plastics, in the coming year. He reminded members that, in conjunction with the British Plastics Federation, guidance on enforcing legislation on plastics had previously been produced for local authorities.

6. Future FSA-funded research on food contact materials (WPFCM/131).

6.1 The *Chairman* drew members' attention to Annex III of WPFCM/131, on proposals for projects for possible commissioning in Financial Year 2003. He invited members to comment on these proposals and to suggest other areas, indicating that 'relevance' was a key matter in these considerations.

6.2 The *Chairman* then asked members for their comments on the proposal for a project on substances migrating from ion-exchange resins. *Dr Castle* responded that this was an important area for research as in the use of the resins, for example to treat juices, a large area of ion-exchange resin makes contact with the foodstuff.

Additionally, the consumption of these beverages is high. *Mr Reynolds* asked to what extent ion-exchange resins were re-used and to what degree they are damaged after re-generation. He gave an example of the tainting of cider during production, that might have occurred in this way. *Dr Castle* confirmed that the ion-exchange resins are re-used and consequentially this was a worthwhile area of investigation. It was agreed that foreseeable mis-use should be incorporated in any proposal on this topic.

- 6.3 The *Chairman* introduced the topic of latex protein as a potential migrant from food contact materials. He stressed that the Agency did not have data to suggest that migration occurred from rubber latex, but referred to one recent publication which indicated that latex protein might be transferred to food during handling by processors wearing latex gloves. For those individuals who are affected by exposure to this material, although the number of such people is small, it is a serious matter and might result in anaphylactic shock in sensitive individuals.
- 6.4 *Mr Sinclair* believed that the US FDA were going to consult on plans to amend their legislation requiring food handlers to wear gloves. He referred to a report conducted on the skin sensitivity of medical workers in the USA. He also reported that he had chaired a meeting with the Latex Allergy Support Group. The *Chairman* agreed that the group appears to have a genuine fear and that this subject offers a credible case for further scientific research. Levels at which a reaction was triggered would have to be considered. *Dr Shavila* suggested joint work with the Medical Devices Agency in order to put exposure into context. He commented that it may be worthwhile to conduct a study with epidemiological specialists.
- 6.5 *Dr Barnes* commented that it may be difficult to quantify the levels of latex protein transmitted from gloves to the wearer. In the recent paper on this, experimentation had been conducted on extreme conditions of use. She then referred to an example where a local health authority had asked staff not to wear latex gloves. A legislative route banning the use of latex gloves in food handling may be an alternative approach. *Dr Castle* noted that PVC gloves had been banned in several countries and concluded that there was a need for a balanced approach. He also acknowledged the difficulties associated with interpreting results. The *Chairman* confirmed that the Agency would have to take a strong line where anaphylactic

shock might be involved. However he stressed the need for careful science to establish whether there was an issue.

6.6 *Mr Whitaker* drew attention to the fact that if food handlers were asked to stop using latex gloves, it might lead to demands for latex to be withdrawn from other applications. He pointed out that while there may be suitable alternatives to rubber latex in the case of gloves, there may not be suitable alternative substances available for other latex-type applications. Any investigation should be more far-reaching than simply an investigation into rubber gloves. He informed members that his customers often enquire about rubber used as an adhesive sealant for can ends. *Mr Parry* reported cases of where latex is used on packaging sealant in confectionery bars.

6.7 The *Chairman* asked for comments on possible research on basketware in contact with food. *Dr Barnes* observed that the area of basketware had not as yet been investigated. *Mr Reynolds* considered decorative finishes, lacquers and retained microbiological contamination as being of potential concern. *Dr Barnes* asked whether there are specific coatings for basketware. *Mr Reynolds* replied that as the production of basketware is often confined to 'cottage industries' very little is known about production techniques. Similarly the quality of water used in soaking willow to make it more pliable for such use is also unknown. Cheap imports from Far East countries might be a problem. The *Chairman* said that there could also be a problem with traceability.

6.7.1 The *Chairman* concluded by recommending that the three proposals listed in the Annex III of WPFCEM/131 go forward for possible inclusion in the Requirements Document, with ion-exchange resins being given priority. *Members* agreed.

ACTION: DR BARNES

6.8 The *Chairman* invited members to put forward other ideas for further research. *Mr Whitaker* expressed concerns over chlorohydrins from epoxidised soya bean oil (ESBO). It was suggested that this was an issue in which the Joint Research Centre may have an interest. He also recommended that the Agency consider an investigation of the chlorohydrins of fatty acids, in view of the fact that oils to which consumers were exposed contained about one per cent of mono-epoxy compounds. These could be converted to chlorohydrins during preparation of the

foodstuff. The *Chairman* thanked *Mr Whitaker*, asking him to leave the matter with FSA, noting the previous surveillance for ESBO and the intention to return to this topic.

- 6.10 The *Chairman* suggested there was not a restriction on investigating physiological effects of contaminants in the FSA's research. He suggested that *Dr Shavila* look into toxicological aspects of epoxy compounds in fats. *Mr Whitaker* reported that adequate supporting information was also required in respect of consumption/exposure assessments. In reply, the *Chairman* noted the difficulties of using probabilistic modelling to assess intakes and asked *Dr Shavila* what the impact of limited exposure data was in SCF deliberations. *Dr Shavila* responded that SCF used to have a working group looking into intakes but this no longer meets regularly. *Dr Willetts* noted that there seemed to be a developing interest in the area of exposure/risk assessment. There had been a recent ILSI meeting on this topic, and there was a forthcoming meeting on risk assessment being arranged by the Royal Society of Chemistry.

ACTION: DR SHAVILA

- 6.11 *Mr Barnwell* asked whether with levels of consumer exposure to packaging increasing (especially paper and board) the Agency is overlooking a potentially vital area of research (on changes in use of packaging). Some work had been done by industry. *Dr Barnes* explained that there is currently a project underway investigating aspects of the packaging for staple foodstuffs in the diet. It includes a categorisation of the risk associated with chemical components in the packaging, though it is only a 'sighting' study. At the suggestion *Mr Barnwell* said he could possibly attend the next meeting with the contractors for this project. *Dr Barnes* noted that the project is nearing completion so this may not be possible, but *Mr Barnwell* could be sent a copy of the published report. *Mr Reynolds* asked whether the project would provide information on differing approaches to packaging made by different retailers, citing an example of rice packaged either in cardboard or in heat-sealed plastic bags. *Dr Barnes* referred to soup as an example of a product in the project where different types of packaging were being considered. *Mr Barnwell* asked whether a boxed-pizza was included in this project. *Dr Willetts* noted that this was included in a current project on take-away foods.

6.12 The *Chairman* then invited members to consider Annex IV of WPF/CM/131. He noted that all materials apart from metals/alloys and cork had been prioritised equally. *Mr Reynolds* suggested that materials should be ranked by frequency of use. *Mr Cass* commented that attention should not be limited to current uses of packaging but also to estimated future use. He agreed with *Mr Whitaker* that the use of laminates and recycled materials was likely to increase in the future. *Mr Barnwell* noted that the recycling of paper and board was established. *Mr Whitaker* added that investigating recycled packaging (especially plastics) would be worthwhile. He considered that it was difficult to demonstrate if such materials were safe for use. Whilst not so concerned with glass and metal he suggested that imported items, for example recycled kitchen roll, required attention.

6.13 *Mr Reynolds* observed that peelable and resealable packaging does not always get realigned between use. He asked whether this was being investigated. The *Chairman* responded that this could be looked into. *Mr Reynolds* then asked if any work had been conducted on claims made by packaging manufacturers that their products are 'easily openable'. *Mr Grayhurst* confirmed that the Packaging Federation was looking into this matter. The main priority was to protect the contents and this might conflict with ease of opening. *Mrs Townshend* commented that if convenience foodstuffs are to be eaten 'on the move' then they must be openable without the need for kitchen implements. The *Chairman* welcomed the flow of information on this topic and asked Mr Sinclair to make enquiries (within the Agency) about progress on resealable packaging.

ACTION: MR SINCLAIR

6.14 *Mr Reynolds* expressed his concerns over the exposure of base metals after the covering of plated metalware had been removed. *Dr Barnes* referred to an FSA-funded project on the migration of metals and coating materials from kitchenware products, and a project investigating migration from ceramics. The effects on migration of repeat use, including scouring and dishwashing cycles, are being investigated in both of these projects.

7. Papers for information: (Badge and related substances in canned foods WPFCEM/132, 2-Mercaptobenzothiazole and benzothiazole from rubber WPFCEM/133, and Survey of bisphenols in canned foods WPFCEM/134).

7.1 These papers were noted.

8. Any other business

8.1 The *Chairman* informed members that the Research Review Group, chaired by Sir John Arbuthnott, had published its review of the Agency's research portfolio and the future strategy for the programme of research and surveillance. In its recommendations, the Review Group had highlighted the need for the Agency to establish a Research Advisory Committee (to oversee the Agency's research strategy and advise on the direction of its research). It was also recommended that the Agency should develop active links with other appropriate research organisations and that joint funding of initiatives, both nationally and internationally, is encouraged. The Agency should continue to procure the majority of its research through an open and competitive process but this approach should be supplemented by supporting one or two centres of excellence if appropriate, and setting up a scheme for postgraduate scholarships

8.2 *Dr Barnes* said that Dr Roger Wood (FSA) had asked her to draw the attention of Working Party members to a draft report from CEN TC 194/SC1 on the validation of analytical methods, migration testing and analytical data for materials and articles in contact with food. Copies of this report are available from Dr Wood who would appreciate any comments or criticism. Dr Wood's contact details were provided.

9. Date of next meeting

9.1 The *Chairman* informed members that the *Secretariat* would trawl by post for a suitable date for the next meeting, which would be held in May 2002. *Mr Reynolds* asked if the trawl could be performed before Christmas. The *Chairman* confirmed that it would be carried out as quickly as possible.

**SECRETARIAT
December 2001**