



Use of Plastics in Food Packaging Industry

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Plastic packaging materials that come in contact with food products can lead to migration of some chemical substances such as residual monomer, additives, plasticizers, pigments, etc., to food when exposed to different temperatures over a longer duration. Conscious of this fact, the Government encourages use of other packaging materials such as jute for packaging food items, where feasible. All food items cannot, however, be packaged in such alternate materials. Plastic in different forms has, in view of its ability to protect products and extend shelf life, prevent spoilage and contamination, ensuring better storage and sealing aroma, etc. emerged as a widely used material for packaging and storing food. The plastic material is also temper proof and reduces the chances of adulteration, is corrosion resistant and in most cases, chemically inert.

Keeping the above in view, the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011 prescribe Indian Standards for containers made of plastic material of graded specification for packing or storing of food items. These are based on the Bureau of Indian Standards specifications, which also lay down limits of migration of toxic elements. The use of plastics for packaging food in conformity with specified standards is considered safe in the context of contemporary scientific knowledge.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has conducted a study jointly with Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP) and National Test House (NTH) to determine the migration of chemical contaminants and heavy metals from packaging into food. IIP was given the responsibility to undertake the study on chemical contamination from packaging material used for packaged food items, focusing majorly on plastics, paper and other materials. IIP has analysed 1250 samples. National Test House was given the responsibility to undertake the study on chemical contamination from loose packaging material, including paper cups, plates, plastic cups, carry bags and allied materials. NTH has analysed 1760 samples.

Opinion regarding safety of plastic very widely and a scientific consensus on the issue is yet to be reached. However, the way forward is to judiciously use all available scientific knowledge and technology to mitigate the adverse effects that may emanate from migration of chemicals from packaging material to packaged food and evolve innovative techniques for use of recycled packaging material in an environment friendly manner.

The Minister of State (Health and Family Welfare), Sh Ashwini Kumar Choubey stated this in a written reply in the Lok Sabha here today.

MV/LK

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