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Metal Packaging and Epoxy Coatings Assure Food Safety

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Canning is the most significant innovation in the preservation of food in human history. The metal food can, now more than 200 years old, remains a highly trusted form of packaging for food. The metal food can is a completely tamper resistant package and through innovation is a recyclable, economical, energy-efficient mode of food distribution. Above all the metal can is a safe package because it enables food sterilization and long-term preservation.

Steel and Aluminum are sustainable material choices meeting the most stringent criteria for packaging in that they can be recycled time after time without any loss in material quality. This infinite recycling loop assures us that the metal used today in food packaging can be recycled and returned to the market to be used in another package, a car, a bridge, or numerous other applications. In addition, metal packaging is one the most recycled packaging materials. In fact, the inherent value of metal packaging together with paper, subsidize the recycling of other materials. Stated another way, without metal and paper, curbside collection of household materials would not be economically viable.

The metal can has made nutritious high quality food available everywhere and has changed the way the world produces, preserves and consumes food. Today, more than 1,500 food items are packed in metal packaging, making seasonal produce globally accessible year round. The nature of many of the food products packed today requires the use of an FDA approved “food grade” coating to maintain the taste and quality of the food. Today’s use of Bisphenol A (BPA) -derived epoxy resins is the result of over 60 years of research to develop and provide can liners with the safest and most effective food contact performance. With the advent of high performance epoxy coatings several decades ago, they are now the coating of choice for metal packaging. This is due to epoxy’s superior performance in almost every criteria required for food protection. The combination of toughness, adhesion, formability, resistance to the wide range of chemistries found in food and beverage products (“product resistance”) and the ability to be used in the high temperature food processing conditions required for sterilization is unsurpassed. This sterilization process guarantees that the packed food is safe from microbiological contamination (“food poisoning”), making canned food the safest for consumers.

This change to epoxy resins has also enabled dramatic increases in the shelf-life of the packed food products. This increase has allowed for significant decreases in food waste due to product expiration. Typically, today’s canned foods have shelf-lives of 2 years or more. Metal food packaging is the only container that is completely lightproof and oxygen-proof. That means the quality and nutrition of the packed food will remain exactly the same over the shelf-life of the product.

The North American Metal Packaging Alliance and its members support sound science and trust the scientific review process that has protected our food supply for decades. The safety of BPA has been evaluated by numerous independent expert panels from around the globe and these independent reviews have consistently concluded that the use of BPA-derived can coatings does not put the public at risk. Two of the most comprehensive reviews were performed just last year by the European Food Safety Authority and the U.S. National Institute of Health’s Center for the Evaluation of Risks to Human Reproduction (CERHR). These reviews clearly state that the use of BPA-epoxy based protective coatings in metal packaging is acceptable for foods for consumers of all ages.

For more information, please review our website at www.metal-pack.org.

The North American Metal Packaging Alliance, Inc. is an organization whose objectives are to support risk-based regulations in North America; influence regulation in other geographies, provide customers with needed information regarding well-founded technologies, and advocate risk-based decision-making in technology decisions.