

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE

HEALTH HAZARDS OF FOOD ADDITIVES

FOOD ADDITIVE INFORMATION No. 33

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RESTRICTION ON USE OF CERTAIN PLASTIC FOOD PACKAGING MATERIALS
MADE WITH VINYL CHLORIDE

The Director-General of the World Health Organization presents his compliments and, pursuant to Resolution WHA 23.50 of the Twenty-third World Health Assembly, has the honour to transmit the following information on food which he has received under provision of this Resolution from the United States Food and Drug Administration. (The original communication from which this information is based is retained in the archives of WHO for consultation.)

Regulations are proposed to prohibit certain plastic food packaging and other food contact materials made with vinyl chloride (VC).

"The action is based on evidence that residues of vinyl chloride may migrate into food from the semi-rigid and generally heavier VC plastics. No such migration has been found from the flexible and generally thinner VC plastics. Vinyl chloride, ordinarily a gas, has been shown to cause cancer when inhaled by humans and is suspected of having a similar potential when ingested.

"The FDA's proposal would ban the use of vinyl chloride plastics in bottles, blister packs, boxes and other semi-rigid and rigid packaging that comes in contact with food. The proposal would also prohibit vinyl chloride plastics in coatings applied to fresh citrus fruits to retain freshness. The proposed regulation would continue to permit VC plastics in pliable (plasticized) film-type wraps, gaskets, cap liners, tubing and package coatings which come in contact with food.

"The FDA proposes no restriction at this time on the widespread use of vinyl chloride plastics in potable water pipes."