

# Triclosan Under Scrutiny

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Posted on: 04/08/2010

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Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), chairman of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee, today called for a ban on many applications of the antimicrobial chemical triclosan, which is found in most consumer soaps and countless other products ranging from toys to lipstick.

Markey called for the ban in conjunction with the release of correspondence from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that raised serious concerns regarding the use of the chemical triclosan. In response to the FDA and EPA letters, Chairman Markey also announced plans to introduce legislation that will accelerate the evaluation and regulation of substances such as triclosan that may harm the human endocrine system.

The FDA today updated its Web site with [information about triclosan](#), a common ingredient added to many consumer products to reduce or prevent bacterial contamination. It may be found in antibacterial soaps and body washes, toothpastes and some cosmetics -- products regulated by the FDA.

In January, Markey sent a [letter to the FDA](#) requesting information about the status of FDA's ongoing review of triclosan in consumer products. In responding to the chairman's letter, the FDA explained that, in light of animal studies raising questions about triclosan's safety, the agency is engaged in an ongoing scientific review to incorporate the most up-to-date data and information into the regulations that govern consumer products containing triclosan. The FDA says it does not have sufficient safety evidence to recommend changing consumer use of products that contain triclosan at this time.

For some consumer products, there is clear evidence that triclosan provides a benefit. For other consumer products, the FDA has not received evidence that the triclosan provides an extra benefit to health. At this time, the agency says it does not have evidence that triclosan in antibacterial soaps and body washes provides any benefit over washing with regular soap and water.

“Despite the fact that this chemical is found in everything from soaps to socks, there are many troubling questions about triclosan's effectiveness and potentially harmful effects, especially for children,” said Markey. “There is clear evidence that many consumer products that contain it are no more effective than those that do not. However, triclosan

continues to be used in products that saturate the marketplace. Consumers—especially parents—need to know that many of these products are not only ineffective, they may also be dangerous. I call upon the federal government to ban the use of triclosan in consumer soaps and handwashes, products intended for use by children, and products intended to come into contact with food. In addition, I will soon introduce legislation to speed up the government’s efforts to evaluate and regulate other substances that may pose similar public health concerns.”

The [EPA letter released by Markey](#) noted that a review of the substance under the Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program (EDSP) provided evidence of its endocrine disrupting potential. However, the letter also noted that EPA does not currently plan to re-evaluate its regulations surrounding the use of triclosan until 2013. Additionally, EPA acknowledged that it does not currently set drinking water standards for triclosan, and it does not consider antibiotic resistance as a factor when deciding which chemicals to monitor or regulate in drinking water.

Markey noted that previous scientific studies have shown that triclosan, which has been detected in drinking water and in 60 percent of U.S. streams, may damage the human endocrine system and can increase antibiotic resistance, which could lead to infections that are not treatable using today’s medications. However, most consumer products containing the chemical are no more effective in protecting against illness than products that do not. Given these findings, the American Medical Association (AMA) Council on Scientific Affairs reported in 2000 that “there is little evidence to support the use of antimicrobials in consumer products such as topical hand lotions and soaps.”

Triclosan is also banned or restricted in several other countries, including the EU, which recently banned triclosan’s use in products that come into contact with food, stating that the chemical’s manufacturer “does not consider the use of the substance in plastics intended to come into contact with food appropriate any more.”

In response to the FDA and EPA letters, Markey announced, “I plan to introduce legislation that will mandate that EPA more quickly test and regulate chemicals such as triclosan that have serious health implications, particularly for children.”

Markey also made several recommendations for the immediate ban on some products containing triclosan as well as improvements to the manner in which other similar compounds are regulated:

1. FDA should quickly finalize its regulations in order to ban the use of triclosan in personal care products, particularly soaps and other cleansers, and determine whether any of these should contain any antimicrobial ingredients, which have not been shown to provide benefits over plain soap and water. FDA should also determine whether to regulate the use of triclosan in cosmetics.
2. EPA and FDA should ban the use of triclosan in any products that are intended to

come into contact with food.

3. EPA and CPSC should ban the use of triclosan in products that are marketed for children aged 12 and under.
4. EPA should act more quickly – well before 2013 – to reevaluate its rules surrounding all uses of triclosan.
5. FDA should re-evaluate its approval of the use of triclosan in Colgate Total toothpaste, since this approval was granted before concerns about triclosan's endocrine disrupting potential or possible contribution to antibacterial resistance were known.
6. EPA should take steps to evaluate the potential of drinking water contaminant candidates to contribute to antibiotic resistance when considering or taking regulatory actions under the Safe Drinking Water Act.