

Materials and articles intended to come into contact with food

2003/0272(COD) - 17/11/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to provide a legal framework, which introduces the possibility to take into account new technological solutions to food packaging and sets some basic requirements for their use.

CONTENT : the European Commission is proposing a revised Regulation on materials which come into contact with food. Among the proposed changes is a more modern approach to the principle that packaging materials should not interact with the food they contain. This will allow the introduction into the EU of "active" and "intelligent" packaging that, for example, prolongs shelf life or monitors and displays information about the freshness of food. The proposal will also set up traceability requirements so that materials coming into contact with food are identified at all stages of production and distribution. Food contact materials are all items intended to touch food. This includes packaging such as plastic wrapping, and glass bottles as well as objects like coffee machines and soup spoons. The revised Regulation also covers adhesives and printing inks. The purpose of this Regulation is to ensure the effective functioning of the internal market in relation to materials and articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs, whilst providing the basis for securing a high level of protection of human health and the interests of consumers. The overall policy objective in terms of expected impacts is to: - secure a high level of protection of human health and the interests of the consumer, - ensure the free movement of materials and articles intended to come into contact with food, - take into account important technological developments in the area of food packaging, - ensure better traceability as well as labelling of materials and articles intended to come into contact with food, - improve the transparency of the authorisation process by specifying the various phases of the procedure, - give the possibility to the Commission to adopt for the implementing measures not only directives, but also decisions and regulations, as the latter are more appropriate for provisions, such as positive lists, - ensure better enforceability of the rules through the establishment of Community and national Reference Laboratories. As stated the proposal also deals with the issue of traceability which is an important part of current EU food legislation as it sets out a system to identify and trace all stages of food production. This is an important safeguard in the event of any possible contamination. The proposed Regulation applies the same principles to the production of food contact materials so businesses in the sector can identify where food contact materials and substances used in their manufacture have come from and where they have been supplied to. The new regulation was prepared following broad consultation with the Member States as well as professional and consumer organisations. It will create a more efficient legal framework and a more transparent procedure for authorising new substances.