

Position note

ECMA recommends to use low migration inks for food packaging and confirms the safety of recycled cardboard in combination with a systematic risk assessment procedure.

In view of ever more research findings, the carton sector has continuously been looking for problem solving improvements in its production process and raw material selection.

Process wise the “Guidance for the use of printing inks for paper and board packaging used for contact with food” developed in the Packaging Ink Joint Industry Task Force was welcomed and adopted as an excellent well adapted additional safety recommendation for the development and production of carton packaging.

On the applied inks, ECMA issued in April last year a first statement on UV printing. Carton makers were recommended to stop the use of not reformulated UV inks and varnishes for food packaging, thus leading to a decrease of the incidents with photo initiators. This year confronted with uncertainties regarding the safety of mineral oils – used in conventional sheet-fed offset ink systems – ECMA first informed its members on the potential migration issues, and agreed mid September to issue a proactive formal public recommendation to use only low migration inks for food packaging. This offered additional safety has however cost consequences.

As certain used substrates were identified as another main source for mineral oil contamination, ECMA confirms at the same occasion the safety of standard recycled cardboard for food packaging, if combined with an appropriate functional barrier. A responsible, safe, direct contact application of recycled cardboard remains however possible for specific food types in combination with a systematic risk assessment. In the medium-term the presence of mineral oils in recycled board may considerably decrease, if newsprint editors would also switch towards more advanced ink systems designed for multipurpose recycling.

Another recent critical step forward is the adoption of a new assessment scheme. The ECMA Technical Committee approved a far reaching food compliance assessment. Based on openness between partners in supply chains, packaging systems are screened and thoroughly tested, thus offering high security carton packaging solutions for food customers.

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