PCB - Articles

GRAS CRITERIA PLANNED FOR INDIRECT ADDITIVES

The Food and Drug Administration is planning to issue criteria for the classification of indirect food additives as "generally recognized as safe," it was indicated by Dr. Virgil O. Wodicka, Director of FDA's Bureau of Foods, at last week's packaging symposium held by the University of California (Davis) (See preceding stories).

The recently promulgated GRAS criteria for direct additives (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, June 28, Page 3) made "no specific mention" of packaging constituents, Wodicka said, adding: "This omission was brought to the attention of the FDA by some of the members of the packaging industry, and they were assured that a similar document will eventually issue with specific reference to packaging." The FDA-er said:

> "There has been criticism of the food criteria primarily on the grounds that many of the terms are relatively vague and subject to interpretation. This is almost inevitably the case. The publication does have the advantage, however, of setting forth a sort of pattern of decision to facilitate making decisions on a consistent basis. This pattern was lacking previously. This is what we now propose to face up to on packaging."

As an example, Wodicka said that "cellulose would certainly be considered GRAS as a packaging component," since it is a food constituent. He noted it is widely used in paper and fiberboard.

However, Wodicka also noted that cellulose is used in recycled form as a packaging material after other uses, warning that "the consequences of these other uses may be a little unsettling." The Food Additive Order for pulp from reclaimed paper (§121.2546) bans "any poisonous or deleterious substance which may have contaminated the paper or paperboard and which may reasonably be expected to be retained in the recovered pulp" (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Sept. 20, Page 12).

The Order on recycled paper coupled with newly-discovered contaminants may pose severe problems, Wodicka indicated. He particularly noted the problem of contamination of fiberboards with polychlorinated biphenyls (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Oct. 4, Page 30), saying that, "We have taken steps necessary to close off this channel of contamination . . ."

However, the FDA-er said the PCB situation is an example "of the kind of problem that we shall all have to be increasingly aware of." He explained:

> "The very water used in such copious quantities in paper making could, itself, be the bearer of significant quantities of undesirable contaminants if drawn from a highly industrialized stream. Both makers and users of packages will have to be more alert to possibilities of contamination of packaging materials and hence eventually of the foods.

"Recycled materials will have to come into use increasingly and will obviously pose a larger problem because of difficulties of control over source materials at tolerable costs. The problems are not confined to these, however. We have measured PCBs in boards made from virgin sulfite. The levels are low, but the fact that they are there at all is puzzling and a little unsettling. Ostensibly pure raw materials must not be assumed free of undesirable contamination."

Wodicka urged "both the packagers and packaging suppliers to initiate or intensify, as the case may be, a survey of the safety of food packages, considering inadvertent constituents as well as those deliberately added."

He said that FDA and other agencies "are increasing their attention to this area, and I feel sure that the industry would rather solve its problems in orderly fashion than to have to do so under regulatory pressure."

The FDA-er said the responsibility for packaging safety "falls most heavily on the processor," adding: "He may find ways to share this burden with his packaging supplier, but I believe he would be rash to stretch the doctrine of implied warranty too far."

●

FDA STRUGGLING WITH POLICY ON PRODUCT DESIGNATIONS

Apparently rejecting use of the term "imitation" in designations for new food products, the Food and Drug Administration is struggling to arrive at "some consistent approach on product designation," Dr. Virgil O. Wodicka, Director of FDA's Bureau of Foods, indicated last week.

At a packaging symposium held by the University of California (Davis), the FDA-er used the problem of naming vegetable protein analogues for meat products as an example of the dilemma facing the agency (See FOOD CHEMICAL NEWS, Aug. 23, Page 3). He indicated rejection of both "imitation meat" and "vegetable protein" as suitable product designations. He said:

"If the product is meat and the label tells the consumer what animal it came from, what part of the carcass, and what quality level is represented, the story is told about as well as it can be. On the other hand, if a very similar product is made of a little less than half of purified soy protein, a little less than half eggwhite, and minor percentages of flavoring, coloring, and other functional ingredients, what does one call it?

"Calling it imitation meat is no help because that only tells the consumer what it is not, not what it is. Calling it vegetable protein is not very descriptive if almost half