

Fact bite #24



Mineral oil hydrocarbons (MOHs)

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MOHs are complex chemical mixtures derived from crude oil. They are commonly measured in food and human tissues with food contact materials being an important source of exposure.

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MOHs can have toxic properties. They can change genetic material, cause cancer, or disrupt hormone systems, and they can gradually build up in our bodies (bioaccumulation).

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MOHs are intentionally used as additives in many different types of food contact materials (FCMs), such as plastics, adhesives, rubber articles, jute and sisal fibers, wax paper and board, and printing inks.

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They are also used during the production of food and/or FCMs as lubricants and defoaming, cleaning, and non-stick agents.

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Environmental pollution as well as non-intentional contamination of packaging can be further sources of MOHs in food.

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Food packaging made of recycled paper and board in particular has been found to contain high levels of MOHs, which often originate from the mineral-oil-based inks used to print newspapers and other publications we recycle.

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