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Plastics

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The Federal Government is working on a plan to eliminate some single use plastic items as early as next year.

The list includes plastic drinking straws, stir sticks, cutlery, six-pack rings, carry-out bags, and styrofoam plates.

On the surface, that doesn't seem like a bad idea. Plastic is everywhere. It's blowing on the streets, lining the ditches, and apparently clogging up the oceans.

The government is planning on dropping certain single use plastics in the ?toxic to the environment' category. That's the same category that lists such things as formaldehyde, asbestos, uranium, vinyl chloride, and a whole list of things that most people have probably never even heard of.

The toxic category lists hexabromocyclocodecane as one of its dangerous substances.

If you happen to have a bottle of hexabromocyclocodecane laying around the house, you may want to call a university and ask to speak to a chemistry professor to find out exactly what you've got there and whether it's safe to have around pets, small children, and plants, or if it has a tendency to explode or combust when exposed to air or sunlight.

While the move to eliminate some plastics may be on the right track, is listing them as ?toxic' the right move?

Most people wouldn't be too worried about having a bundle of plastic in the corner of a room. It doesn't emit any kind of invisible death ray, and although unsightly in a well appointed room, it won't harm you unless for some reason you decide to cook it up for dinner.

At the same time, most people wouldn't be too happy about having a block of yellow cake uranium as a cocktail table centre piece, or having loose asbestos floating freely through the air duct system.

The plastics industry is not happy about this attempt to label their product as dangerous.

You can't blame them for that. After all the plastics industry employs thousands of people and produces a hefty profit for plastics companies as well as those industries that supply the raw materials.

Globally, the plastic packaging market is a $700 billion industry.

A spokesperson for the plastics industry stated that toxic substance rules managed under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act is ?a criminal law tool and is intended to manage toxic substances,? adding that ?plastic is an inert material. It's not toxic.?

I can understand why they want to eliminate certain plastic products. Do you really need that six pack ring thing to hold your beers together? You just pull the beer out when you get home and toss the plastic in the garbage.

Also drinking straws - I don't understand why anyone over the age of six needs a device to drink from a bottle of pop. Try it without the straw ? it's easy!

I'm not so sure about eliminating plastic cutlery. Ordering a take out meal in a shopping mall food court might get messy if you try eating your soup with pair of chopsticks.

It's interesting to note how many things are missing from the list. I guess politicians aren't too eager about eliminating the millions of plastic garbage bags that hit the curb every week and taking their garbage to the curb in handfuls and wheelbarrows.

If they are serious about eliminating some types of plastics, they should start with the current trend of sealing products in hard plastic and hanging them on store shelves.

Everything from household glue to outdoor sporting accessories comes sealed in these impossible to open plastic containers without the use of a utility knife or high intensity laser device.

If you buy a novelty widget to hang from the rear view mirror, you won't be able to open the packaging once you get in the car unless you happen to have your chainsaw in the trunk with you.

The funniest one I've seen was a pair of scissors sealed in plastic, with instructions printed on the front to use a pair of scissors to cut through the plastic to open it and get your product.

If you had a pair of scissors to cut through the plastic, you wouldn't need the new pair of scissors!

Some plastics are recyclable, others can only be used once. However, most recyclable plastics are simply tossed in the garbage where they will sit in a landfill for the next 1,000 years.

If plastic products are going to be listed as toxic substances, we will have to make some lifestyle changes.

I'm going to get in my car with its largely plastic interior, drive to the store to buy some plastic packaged batteries to put in my plastic home flashlight, then watch a DVD movie that came in a plastic case, on my TV which has a plastic case, before finishing off some work on my plastic case computer monitor, and capping the night by brushing my teeth with a plastic toothbrush.

We can't get away from it!