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Mineral oil residue in advent calendars can be avoided

Mineral oil-free printing inks reduce risk of food contamination

There are many sources of mineral oils in food, and they can be reduced or eliminated entirely by taking a number of different measures. One important means is to use mineral oil-free printing inks which can greatly reduce the transfer of mineral oils. Even though technical adjustments to printing machines and inks may be necessary, mineral oil-free inks do not incur any significant additional costs. President Jochen Flasbarth of the Federal Environment Agency is calling for “packaging manufacturers and newspaper printers to make a large-scale switch to mineral oil-free printing inks. This can stop mineral oil from entering the paper cycle directly at the source.” The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) has been using these inks for some time in the sheetfed and heatset offset processes for its printed brochures and flyers – without any sacrifice in quality.

Mineral oils can seep from packaging into foods. Residues can even leak through intermediate packaging and transfer to the product. A test done by Stiftung Warentest which was published on 26 November 2012 detected traces of mineral oil in advent calendar chocolate. In some of the samples testers found more than 10 milligrams of mineral oil per kilo of chocolate. A number of different reasons that are thought to be responsible for this. Mineral oils and compounds with oil-like properties can seep from both printing inks and plastic packaging. These printing inks also have a negative impact on paper recycling. When these inks are used on recycled paper, the paper may again contain mineral oils which is then transferred to foods. Other potential source points of mineral oils traced in foods are the machine oils used in production equipment and in packaging made of recycled paper that is used in transport. An effective block in the packaging of high-risk foods is necessary to protect consumers. These solutions are already on the market, and great efforts are in progress to further develop appropriate concepts.

Nevertheless, packaging made of recycled paper is still more ecological and sustainable than virgin fibre packaging. This advantage can be further increased if mineral oil-free inks are used in paper printing, and in newspaper printing in particular. If newspaper printers used mineral oil-free inks only, they could prevent more than 60,000 tons of mineral oil from entering the paper cycle. The additional costs are estimated to run at 1 to 2 cents per newspaper. Printing ink manufacturers declare that they can supply mineral oil-free printing inks as soon as there is

demand. A number of different companies are already leading by example. The Report Verlagsgesellschaft mbH in Bocholt has been using mineral oil-free inks for newspaper printing since January 2012. The company uses a web offset coldset process. Many supermarket chains are using mineral oil-free inks to print their customer newsletters. The Federal Environment Agency prints all of its publications with mineral-oil free inks using a sheet fed offset-heatset process.

Says Jochen Flasbarth, "It is crucial for all the players in the value added chain to help reduce the input of mineral oil into the material cycle. By using mineral oil-free printing inks, a great step is made in this direction directly at source. This is sustainable both in terms of consumer protection and environmental protection." German publishers and printers are called upon as important players in the paper recycling loop to translate the successes of a few individual companies in mineral oil-free printing and adopt them for the production of press products on a large scale.

For more information on environmentally friendly papers see the German-language brochure entitled *Papier. Wald und Klima* at www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien/8156.html. The publication can be ordered or downloaded free of charge.

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