Chemical BPA found on cash register receipts

BPA levels higher than those in canned foods, baby bottles and infant formula were detected on at least one of several receipts from Chevron, McDonalds, CVS, KFC, Whole Foods, Safeway, the U.S. Postal Service, Walmart, and the U.S. House of Representatives cafeteria, according to the private Washington-based research group.

BPA, a plastic hardener linked to breast cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other health problems, reacts with dye to form black print on receipts handled by millions of Americans every day.

"A typical employee at any large retailer who runs the register could handle hundreds of the contaminated receipts in a single day at work," said Jane Houlihan, the group's senior vice president for research.

The Environmental Working Group collected 36 receipts from retailers in seven states and the District of Columbia and had them tested by the University of Missouri Division of Biological Sciences laboratory.
It says the lab's wipe tests, which easily removed BPA, indicate the chemical could rub off on someone's hands but adds that scientists have yet to determine how much is absorbed into the body.

Appleton Papers Inc. of Appleton, Wisc., the nation's largest thermal paper maker, recently removed BPA from its products, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun evaluating BPA alternatives in thermal paper.

Increasingly, states are moving to ban BPA from food and drink containers, primarily those meant for infants and toddlers, because of health concerns.

Bans are "not necessary," Steve Hentges, a BPA specialist at the American Chemistry Council, which opposes them, has told Green House. He says research shows BPA is safe.

In January, the Food and Drug Administration, which previously called BPA safe, announced it has "some concerns" about the chemical's potential effects on brain development of fetuses, infants and children. It did not say BPA is unsafe.

The Environmental Working Group recommends these tips for reducing BPA exposure from receipts:

- Minimize receipt collection by declining receipts at gas pumps, ATMs and other machines when possible.
- Store receipts separately in an envelope in a wallet or purse.
- Never give a child a receipt to hold or play with.
- After handling a receipt, wash hands before preparing and eating food (a universally recommended practice even for those who have not handled receipts).
- Do not use alcohol-based hand cleaners after handling receipts. A recent study showed that these products can increase the skin's BPA absorption.
- Take advantage of store services that email or archive paperless purchase records.
- Do not recycle receipts and other thermal paper. BPA residues from receipts will contaminate recycled paper.
- If you are unsure, check whether paper is thermally treated by rubbing it with a coin. Thermal paper discolors with the friction; conventional paper does not.
UM System researches different retirement plan for new employees

By Abby Rogers
July 26, 2010 | 7:00 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The University of Missouri System is considering a plan that would require new faculty and staff to contribute a specific amount of money per paycheck into their retirement accounts.

Under a "defined contribution plan," new faculty and staff would pay a mandated amount per paycheck to an account for their retirement funds. This plan would mandate the amount of money each employee contributes to the account, not the amount of money each employee receives upon retirement, said Betsy Rodriguez, system vice president for human resources.

Leona Rubin, chairwoman of MU's Faculty Council, said that at this point, she hasn't heard how much each employee would be required to contribute to the retirement fund. The system is still collecting data, so no numbers have been finalized.

The average employee contribution for schools in the Big 10 and the Big 12 is 5 percent of each paycheck, Rodriguez said.

The current retirement plan for all employees is called a "defined benefit plan." Under this plan, the system guarantees each employee a certain amount of money upon retirement. Employers have to contribute varying amounts into each employee's funds because of changes in the market, among other things.

Rodriguez said that in the current plan, the risk is on the employer because the system is guaranteeing a set amount upon retirement.

Although Rubin said she doesn't know whether the new plan is the right move for the system, she said the defined benefit plan isn't a viable option for the system anymore.
"I think the defined benefit plan is a dinosaur," Rubin said.

The new plan would switch the investment risk from the university to the employee. In a defined contribution plan, the employer is just mandating a contribution from each employee but not guaranteeing an end result.

Rubin said few large companies or universities have defined benefit plans anymore.

"It's much too hard for the institution to keep it fully funded and to keep it viable with fluctuating economic conditions," Rubin said.

There would be some initial costs under the new plan. In a defined benefit plan, both the employer and employees invest in the retirement plan. Employees have to work for the system for at least five years before they are considered vested and able to keep their share of the money they invest in the retirement account. When employees leave before five years, they forfeit to the system the employer's share of the money that has already been invested. This part of the money has traditionally been used to fund remaining employees.

In a defined contribution plan, employees have immediate vesting and would be able to keep the money they invest regardless of when they leave.

Rubin said the immediate vesting aspect is the biggest concern she has heard from faculty. Most employees who become vested in the retirement program want to stay in the system, she said. Now that they can take their retirement fund with them, there is less of an incentive to stay.

Peter Bowers, contract manager for the University of Colorado-Boulder, said the university's defined contribution program has helped retention rates among faculty. He said the fact that employees are able to control their retirement fund's investment is attractive to them, which is an incentive to stay.

The University of Colorado-Boulder has used a defined contribution plan since 1924. It requires employees to contribute 5 percent to their retirement funds.

Switching plans means the system would lose out on the forfeiture money, which would raise the system's cost for a period of time. However, this increased cost is expected to diminish after about 10 years, possibly a little longer, Rodriguez said.
When researching the new retirement plan, the system considered what other universities were doing. Comparable universities in the Big 10 and the Big 12 have defined contribution plans for faculty, Rodriguez said.

"And that's actually true across the country, not just for our peers," Rodriguez said.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln has had a defined contribution plan since 1969. Gregory Clayton, director of risk management and insured benefits, said it was his understanding that the university adopted the plan after worrying about not getting enough state funding.

Both faculty and staff contribute to the retirement fund at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The decision to switch to a defined contribution plan was a positive one for the university.

"It seems to have worked out well," Clayton said.

The proposed plan for new employees would not affect retirement plans for current employees, Rodriguez said. According to a previous Missourian article, current UM System employees are required to pay a percentage of their salaries to the UM retirement fund each month.

Rodriguez said that once the school year starts, she plans to schedule meetings with employees to get feedback on the proposed plan. She said she hasn't found a way to tap into potential employees' feedback yet but might talk to new employees to get their thoughts.

At the UM System Board of Curators meeting on Friday, Rodriguez told the curators she hopes to have a proposal to them by December.
Demand Exceeds Supply Of On-Campus K-State Housing
Mizzou Deals With Similar Trend, KU Has Plenty Of Rooms

UPDATED: 6:48 am CDT July 27, 2010

MANHATTAN, Kan. -- Kansas State University said it needs some help from the city of Manhattan to respond to a high demand for on-campus housing.

Although the university has added 700 student rooms in the last three years, it still does not have enough rooms for students this fall.

K-State's Associate Director of Housing and Dining Derek Jackson said that Monday was the tipping point for running out of on-campus housing. He said students who have already returned their housing contracts will have rooms. And enrollments for the fall semester are still being accepted.

Jackson said students may be housed in campus apartments or study rooms in the halls. And the university is talking to hotels to provide some spots for students.

"We're working with local hotels to do some short-term temporary housing," Jackson said. Jackson said the university hit capacity on Monday morning and began taking names on a waiting list. He said they expect to have approximately 150 students beyond what they can accommodate on campus.

Jackson said nicer, renovated housing and more apartment-style housing makes the option more attractive to students, and the fixed cost makes it a more attractive option to parents in the present economy.

But what distinguishes K-state from the University of Missouri is the town around it. Jackson said Manhattan is experiencing a surge in growth as well, so it's not as easy for K-state's housing staff to find temporary alternatives off-campus.

"I mean, Manhattan is changing its demographic," Jackson said.

University of Missouri spokesman Christian Basi said housing shortages on the MU campus has been a problem for the past three years. He said the issue seems to stem from both an increase in enrollment, as well as an increase in the percentage of students interested in on-campus housing.

"Basically," Basi said, "we are victims of our own success. Students love it so much, they want to stay."

With a few exceptions, freshmen at Mizzou are required to live on campus. Basi said that typically 30-35 percent of those freshmen choose to return to on-campus housing in their following years. Now, he said, that percentage is closer to 40 percent.
Enrollment itself has also been increasing there since 2001, according to Basi. It is the same year the university began a master plan to add extra rooms. Basi said it was two years ago that the situation became so extreme that the university had to stop accepting applications in order to ensure a positive academic environment. Since then, MU has added faculty to address the academics, and for the past two years, has addressed the housing shortage by leasing two nearby apartment complexes and creating staff-monitored dormitory-style housing in selected buildings, he said.

Basi said this year the university had to go one step further, leasing space at the nearby Stephens College.

He said students who returned housing contracts by the June 1 deadline will certainly be accommodated, and the university does expect to be able to accommodate later requests as well.

In Lawrence at the University of Kansas, university officials said they have plenty of on-campus housing to start the fall semester.

Copyright 2010 by KCTV5.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.