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Awareness and interpretation of the symbols and codes by housewives used in plastic packaging

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ABSTRACT : Food packaging has played an important role in the life of consumers .Packaging is best tool for transportation, protection and in preservation of food. Packaging phenomenon has grown from plant leaves to polymeric chemical compound plastic and thus continuously replacing its other counterparts, its various properties e.g. lightweight, strength, moisture resistance and durability has made it favorite for packaging industry so causing an increase in plastic production at a rate of about 5 per cent per year since 1973 (IWMB, 2003). The Indian polymer industry continues to show a growth rate of 15 per cent per annum. Studies have reported that plastics polymers pose potential hazards on human ecology, they have tendency of migrating the toxic chemicals as well as plastic's economical and environmental impact. Chemical additives used in plastics like phthalates or phthalic acid esters (PAE's), bisphenol A (BPA) could be transferred to human directly from plastics, via food and drink that is packaged in plastics. Plastics can be identified by the resin type code given from American Plastics Council. The picture and codes printed on plastics packaging can play an important role in spreading awareness regarding plastic produce toxicity for health and environment. Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to study the awareness and interpretation of symbols and codes printed on plastic packages among house wives. Data were collected by interview-cum-questionnaire method. It was found that awareness level was very less regarding plastic resin code though they knew about recycling symbols.

KEY WORDS : Food packaging, Plastic polymers, Additives, Toxicity, Awareness

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Advances in food packaging had played an important role in the life of consumers. Packaging phenomenon has grown from plant leaves used to cover the food, afterward materials e.g. cloth ,metal, paper and glass were offered by the civilization though from few decades, a polymeric chemical compound plastic is continuously replacing its other counterparts. It is an established fact that packaging is best tool for transportation, protection and in preservation for food, its various properties e.g. lightweight, strength, moisture resistance and durability has made it favorite for packaging industry thus causing an increase in plastic production at a rate of about 5 per cent per year since 1973 (IWMB, 2003). The Indian polymer industry continues to show a growth rate of 15 per cent p.a.The per capita consumption of plastics is around 5 kg. today as compared to the world average of 20 kg. This is all set to double to a figure around 10 kg. by 2012.

Plastics are derived from non-renewable source petroleum and natural gas by a chain reaction of polymerization on ethylene gas. Thermosets and thermoplastics (EPA, 2006) are its common categories. Thermosets are strong and durable, so tend to be used primarily in automobiles and construction applications . While thermoplastics are polymers that soften upon exposure to heat and return to their original condition at room temperature ,they could be moldable, finished into sheets, shapes, and structures, offering considerable design flexibility thus they are widely prevalent and used in food packaging industry ,additionally, all thermoplastics are recyclable (melted and reused as raw materials for production of new products),