

I REFER to the letter by M.S.R. of Johor Baru ("No action despite complaints" -- NST, March 24) alleging that hawkers fried snacks with their plastic wrappers and that this posed a health risk to consumers.

The Health Ministry is investigating this matter. Samples of frying oil and snacks (for example, fried bananas, keropok lekor) are being analysed by the Chemistry Department.

Preliminary results do not show the presence of plastic materials. More samples are being analysed and the results will be available soon.

In general, plastics are long-chain polymers to which colourants and other additives are added to control the physical properties of the plastic. Plastic bottles are made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and plastic straws are made from a formulated blend of polyethylene, plastic resin, colourants and other additives. General toxicity and genotoxicity studies on PET indicate this material does not pose a threat to human health and polypropylene is a safe food-contact plastic material.

However, the colourants, additives, preservatives and plasticisers in the plastic materials are toxic and the public might be at risk if these materials are ingested.

When plastic is heated, it may melt and degrade, releasing all its components, including the plastic mono-mers, into the frying oil.

The ministry would appreciate it if the public could alert health authorities of such negligent practices.

Consumers should exercise their right to boycott the vendors of such food.

**By : NORAINI MOHD OTHMAN, Director, Food Safety and Quality Division Health Ministry**

**From frying pan into the fire**

THE Consumers Association of Penang is concerned over the recent complaint about a trader at a pasar tani in Larkin, Johor Baru, using plastic in the oil used for preparing potato chips.

This was followed by an earlier report of a trader using plastic in oil when frying pisang goreng in order to keep them crispy.

These cases come hot on the heels of a report where a factory in Kepala Batas was closed down for violating various health regulations, including using recycled oil for cooking and storing cooking oil in unhygienic recycled plastic containers.

We believe these are not isolated cases and is the practice throughout the country.

A study on heated vegetable cooking oil was conducted by a research officer, Dr Tony Ng Kock Wai, of the Institute for Medical Research, and published in the Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences in January 2006.

It is understood that deep-frying can give rise to the creation of by-products that are either volatile, such as peroxides and aldehydes, or non-volatile compounds. It is these non-volatile components, or polar compounds, which give rise to health concerns.

The results of this study strongly suggest a link between the long-term consumption of heated vegetable oils that contain 25 per cent of polar compounds with adverse effects on growth and body biochemistry, including raised levels of serum alkaline phosphatase (an indicator of liver function) and traces of albumin in the urine (an indicator for possible kidney damage).

The enlargement of the liver, heart and kidneys was observed.

Dr Ng's study revealed significant adverse effects on pregnancy, including a high number of stillborn births and poor growth prior to weaning. The survival of the maternal animal subjects was also affected significantly.

The symptoms preceding death included an apparent prolonged gestation period, lethargy and extensive uterine haemorrhage

Other researchers have also linked the consumption of



## **NST : Plastics in food probe: Report these hawkers for action**

Written by Administrator

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grateful if the Health Ministry, together with the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry, could take action to counter this public health menace. <br />◆<br /><em>By : TAM YONG YUEE, Muar◆ - 25 March 2008</em><p> </p>