



THE GOLDHABER WARNINGS REPORT



VOL. II

MAY 2010

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT: DO WE NEED BETTER MICROWAVE AND FOOD WARNINGS?

PART ONE: MICROWAVE OVEN WARNINGS

Today, I attempted to cook a frozen dinner in my microwave oven and the instructions on the food's label told me to heat the dinner for 2 ½ minutes in a high wattage (over 800 watts) microwave oven and for 3 minutes in a low wattage oven. Like most consumers, I didn't know the wattage of my oven; after looking both outside and inside the oven, I found a small label with even smaller print stating that the output wattage (i.e., the amount of wattage emitted by the microwave oven to actually cook the food) was 1000 watts. However, before I decided to cook the dinner for the recommended 2 ½ minutes, I placed a call to my friend, Bob Schiffmann (www.microwaveinnovations.com), who is among the top microwave experts in the world. Bob has tested microwave ovens for years, has over 50 microwave ovens in his labs and has found that most microwaves do NOT carry wattage labels and that even if they did, his testing has found that the manufacturers' claimed wattage can actually vary from 15-25% from the actual wattage, that this "output" wattage can vary several times over a few hours and actually changes from day to day.

This problem of nonexistent or inaccurate information can have real consequences for our health. In October, 2007, one of the largest food companies in the world, ConAgra Foods, recalled all Banquet and store brand pot pies due to a potential link to an outbreak of salmonella. ConAgra's label called for the use of microwaves with at least 1100 watts and consumers were instructed to measure the internal temperature of the "not-ready-to-eat" products to be sure it was at least 165 degrees. This instruction, of course, presumes that consumers' microwave ovens have labeled the wattage, that the wattage is consistent during every use, that the consumer has a food thermometer to measure the food and knows how and where to measure the food (in several locations). And, what about those Americans who are either totally or functionally illiterate (over 1/3 of Americans either cannot read at all or read below the 5th grade level)?

On July 15, Bob will chair a food safety panel at the International Microwave Power Institute's annual meeting in Denver that will address these issues. Featured on his panel will be some very high-powered people from the FDA and the food industry, including representatives from both ConAgra and the American Frozen Food Institute. Bob promises to "hold their feet to the fire!" Good luck, Bob.

Next month, we will address the broader, and perhaps even more serious issue of food warnings.

Feel free to pass this issue of the Goldhaber Warnings Report on to any friend or colleague.