

S.T.O.P.- Safe Tables Our Priority is a national, non-profit, volunteer health organization dedicated to preventing suffering, illness and death due to foodborne disease by advocating sound public policy, increasing awareness and education, and providing victim assistance.

In January of 2006 S.T.O.P. co-signed a letter with the Consumer Federation of America asking the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to re-visit their acceptance of carbon monoxide usage in case ready meats as a generally recognized as safe (GRAS) substance. While we are unaware of any data showing that the ingestion of carbon monoxide is inherently dangerous, we are concerned about this particular use of carbon monoxide in case ready meats prepared in modified atmosphere packaging (known as MAP). Our concerns center around the change in appearance of the case ready meats processed with carbon monoxide and the potential dangers they pose for the health and well being of American consumers.

- Carbon monoxide used in the MAP process causes the meats to turn a bright, red and more appealing color. This process also serves to mask the natural browning of the meat that would take place over time.
- The bright red color of the meat lasts a very long time and could confuse consumers into thinking the meat is fresh when it is not. This bright red color is not just a fixing of the color already there, but actually causes the formation of a new compound in the meat.
- Bacteria might be present in high numbers while the meat continues to look bright red and fresh because of the carbon monoxide-MAP process.
- Case ready packages of meat processed with carbon monoxide are not at this time required to be labeled so consumers have no knowledge that the bright red color is artificially induced and no choice in whether or not they purchase it and serve it to their families.

Proponents of this process routinely state that food safety is not an issue here. S.T.O.P. disagrees. We are very concerned that problems in storage, handling or temperature abuse with this carbon monoxide treated case ready meat could render the meat unsafe to eat while it retains a fresh red color. The same types of problems with untreated meat would be more apparent to consumers because the product would have turned brown. The USDA has confirmed that adding carbon monoxide to case ready meats does not provide any added food safety benefit that the case ready meats do not already have. This processing has no purpose other than to make consumers think the meat is something it is not-fresh.

After independent scientific research was conducted, the European Union (EU) banned this type of processing for meats. The FDA and the USDA first approved this process in the United States in 2002 without conducting any independent scientific research and it has been creeping into grocery stores in the United States ever since. S.T.O.P. is calling on the FDA and the USDA to suspend the GRAS approval of carbon monoxide in the MAP process for case ready meats, to open the science behind this decision to public scrutiny, and to immediately require any meat products produced in this manner to be labeled as processed with carbon monoxide

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