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Subway agrees to end use of controversial chemical after food blogger Vani Hari's protest

Sandwich maker's move follows petition in social media

By Chantal Da Silva, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 06, 2014 10:25 AM ET | Last Updated: Feb 06, 2014 10:25 AM ET



Food blogger Vani Hari led a campaign asking Subway to remove azodicarbonamide from its bread. (Courtesy Vani Hari)

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Subway says it will be discontinuing use of a chemical found not only in its bread, but also in yoga mats, shoe soles and rubber caps after an online petition made waves across the web.

Food blogger Vani Hari — who successfully petitioned Kraft to remove the neon orange dye responsible for its signature Macaroni & Cheese colouring last year— is behind the effort. With more than 50,000 signatures, her petition demanding that Subway stop using azodicarbonamide as a food additive helped convince the food chain giant to comply.

The chemical agent has already been banned across Europe, as well as in Britain and Australia and while Hari says Subway does not include the additive in those countries, it's still used in sandwiches distributed across North America.

Subway said it is already in the process of phasing out the chemical's use in its products in the U.S. and Canada. "The complete conversion to have this product out of the bread will be done soon," the food chain said in a statement Wednesday to the Associated Press. A timeline hasn't yet been provided.

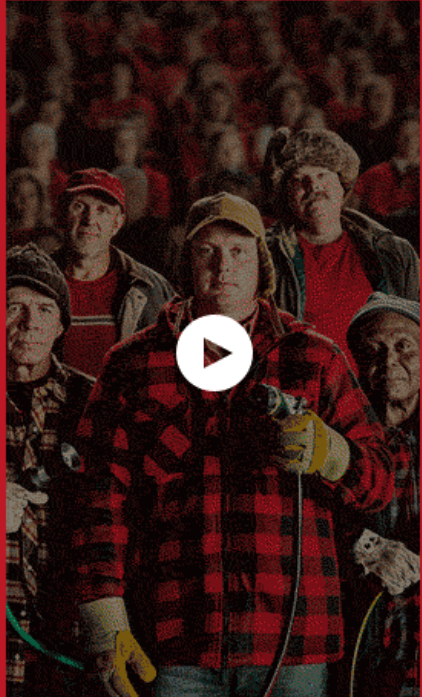
Hari said that while this isn't the first time she has tried to reach out to Subway regarding its use of the chemical, she commends the company on its decision. "Their swift action is a testament to what power petitions can have," she said, adding that she would still warn consumers to stay away from their sandwiches until the chemical's use is removed.

The Charlotte, N.C. blogger started investigating Subway sandwich ingredients on her popular blog, [FoodBabe.com](#) in 2012, when she

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discovered the company's use of azodicarbonamide.

"I had been eating Subway my whole life, thinking it was healthy fast food until I found out that it's not eating 'fresh' at all," Hari said, playing on the food chain giant's "Eat Fresh" slogan.

The food blogger's decision to petition Subway was made as soon as she learned that the U.S. president's wife, **Michelle Obama**, would be teaming up with Subway to promote its sandwiches in a campaign marketing healthy foods to children.

"The bottom line is that they save more money using this ingredient because they can produce the bread faster and cheaper," the food blogger added. The petition has since reached more than 65,000 signatures.

What is azodicarbonamide?

According to the World Health Organization, azodicarbonamide is a chemical primarily used by rubber and plastics industries to produce items like rubber caps and shoe soles. The chemical is also used in certain pesticides.

As a food additive, it's used as a flour bleaching agent, as well as an improving agent, meaning it makes the dough easier to work with and also enhances the development of gluten.

Real risks still unclear

While some research has been done on the health risks of **workplace exposure** to azodicarbonamide, little information about the short and long-term effects of its consumption exists.

Prolonged workplace exposure to the chemical has been **linked to asthma**, but Health Canada stated in 2004 that the product did not pose a health risk under the levels permitted by Canadian Food and Drug Regulations.

■ Work-related carcinogens need more scrutiny

Research by the European Food Safety Authority also found that as the chemical agent degrades in the heating process, it can form trace amounts of semicarbazide—a substance belonging to a family of chemicals associated with causing cancer in animals, but a statement **archived** on the Health Canada website in 2013 said that any risk that might exist from exposure to the chemical is low.

Still, Dr. Barry Blakely, a toxicology professor at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, believes more research needs to be done surrounding food additives like azodicarbonamide.

"There's a risk assessment issue here — why are they putting it in?" Blakely said. "Is there a real benefit other than colour or keeping the food soft? And is that a legitimate reason to add risk to the equation? If, maybe it causes cancer or maybe it causes asthma, which is more important to you — having that fluffy cookie or having a reduced risk of asthma or cancer?"

While the chemical agent has been given the green light for use in food products in North America, Blakely said you won't find it in Subway chains overseas because of stricter guidelines surrounding food safety.

"Europe has very stringent guidelines in terms of what they will and will not allow," Blakely said. "They've decided that they just don't want to go there."

With files from The Associated Press

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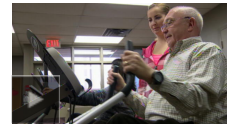
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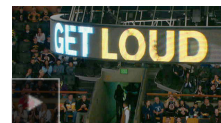
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