The Regulation\(^1\) on additives sets out rules on additives used in packaged foods and contains a list of them. The E numbers category includes vitamin C (E300), paprika (E160c) and oxygen (E948), and most of them are safe in reasonable quantities.

Many people are worried about the long-term effect of consuming certain E numbers and their effects on children, however. Even though E numbers are tested before they are brought onto the market, some have been clearly linked to harmful side-effects in certain groups of consumers. The result is that the ‘E’ label has negative connotations in the mind of the general public.

European law allows the use of many additives in principle, but requires that information on the ingredients, including additives, be included on the product. Additives may be labelled with a name or number which does not necessarily have to be understandable to the everyday consumer. Concerns are also being raised that excessive labelling is overloading consumers with information which they then do not know how to assess.

Is the Commission planning to carry out an assessment of the effects, transposition and application of this regulation in the near future?

Has the Commission ever examined the possibility of using a different label for additives that are shown to have unwanted side-effects, in order to distinguish them from the other ‘harmless’ additives – for example, by adding a visual identifier to their name or number (E x*, Ex-, Ex!)?

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