

PRESS RELEASE – TUESDAY, 6 JUNE 2017

Unpublished EFSA data shows a lot of food products still exceed benchmark levels for carcinogenic chemical content

One in fourteen food products tested in 2015 continue to have dangerously high levels of acrylamide, the analysis of unpublished laboratory results held by the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), has revealed. EFSA data was released following an access to information request.

The analysis, conducted by the Changing Markets Foundation, reviewed the results of almost nine thousand laboratory tests conducted in Europe during 2015. Over 70 percent of these tests were implemented by the food industry and not by food safety authorities.

The highest level (5887 µg/kg), almost six times above the European reference value, was found in a sample of potato crisps taken in Germany. A sample of biscuits taken in Spain had the second highest value (5085 µg/kg), ten times over the European benchmark for that food group.

Interestingly, it is the results from the official tests conducted by European food safety authorities that seem to identify most cases of non-compliance and detect higher levels of acrylamide, as illustrated in the table below.

	Number of samples	Acrylamide levels (µg/kg)			% samples above EC benchmark
		AVERAGE	MIN	MAX	
BREAD (WHEAT)					
Industry	11	15	7	28	0
MS	32	42	4	171	9
BREAD (OTHER)					
Industry	7	27	6	45	0
MS	99	93	6	556	18
ROASTED COFFEE					
Industry	32	140	11	454	3
MS	332	268	4	1314	15
SNACKS					
Industry	6258	424	10	2600	5
MS	324	615	10	5887	18

Source: EFSA

“Our analysis suggests that there is a significant discrepancy between industry’s self-monitoring and official results from the European authorities” said Nuša Urbančič, campaigns director at the Changing Markets Foundation. “This makes us question whether such self-monitoring regime is indeed delivering for public health or just covering up for the worst offenders in the industry”.

The presence of acrylamide in food is considered a public health concern by EFSA as it increases the risk of developing cancer, and young children are the most vulnerable [1].

Although data suggests there has been a slight downward trend across some food categories compared to previous years [2], it is alarming that the highest proportion of offending products are found in categories of foods destined for babies, with one in four of all cereal based baby food samples being above the European reference level [3].

	Number of samples	Acrylamide levels (µg/kg)				% above benchmark	Country (sale) of sample with maximum value
		EC benchmark	Average	Minimum	Maximum		
BABY FOODS	24	50	27	5	62	13	Denmark
BISCUITS	607	500	205	4	5085	4	Spain
BISCUITS & RUSKS BABIES	51	200	85	12	604	10	Cyprus
BREAD (OTHER)	106	150	88	6	556	17	Germany
BREAD (WHEAT)	43	80	35	4	171	7	Germany
BREAKFAST CEREAL (OTHER)	125	200	108	10	649	2	Hungary
BREAKFAST CEREAL (WHEAT)	3	300	192	10	286	0	Poland
CEREAL BASED BABY FOODS	65	50	42	7	407	23	The Netherlands
COFFEE SUBSTITUTES (CEREALS)	6	2000	516	39	1188	0	France
COFFEE SUBSTITUTES (OTHER)	37	4000	382	10	794	0	Germany
CRISPBREAD	106	450	270	13	1333	15	Germany
FRENCH FRIES	365	600	373	7	2972	13	The Netherlands
GINGERBREAD	176	1000	314	12	2554	6	Germany
INSTANT COFFEE	27	900	474	7	1101	7	Denmark
ROASTED COFFEE	364	450	256	4	1314	14	Spain
SNACKS	6582	1000	433	10	5887	6	Germany
OTHER	155	-	-	-	-	-	
TOTAL	8842						

Source: EFSA

In response to health concerns regarding acrylamide exposure, a legislative proposal is being discussed by the European Commission and Member States and a vote is expected in July. Following the criticism of the proposal by food safety and consumer protection groups, the European Commission promised to introduce maximum levels for acrylamide in certain products in the future [4]. However, the most recent proposal remains silent as to whether, and if so, when such measures will be introduced [5]. The proposal also keeps the bulk of monitoring of acrylamide levels firmly in the hands of industry.

“It is very concerning that babies and children continue to be exposed to high levels of acrylamide in foods destined for them,” said Eoin Dubsy, campaigns manager at SumOfUs. “Almost 250,000 Europeans are asking Commissioner Andriukaitis to put in place binding levels for acrylamide in foods as soon as possible to guarantee that consumers are protected from dangerous exposure. It’s perfectly feasible and EU health officials should put public health before profits of food corporations.”

Notes to editors:

- [1] EFSA's scientific opinion acrylamide
<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4104>
- [2] https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/PASSING_THE_HOT_POTATO.pdf
- [3] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013H0647>
- [4] <http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/Commission-to-set-maximum-acrylamide-levels-in-ready-to-eat-foods>
- [5] Marks, S. Brussels pulls back from binding acrylamide targets, Politico, 22.05.17

About SumOfUs:

SumOfUs is a global consumer watchdog: an online community of ten million people who campaign to hold big corporations accountable. We use our power as consumers, workers and investors to hold the biggest companies in the world to account. For more information about SumOfUs please visit sumofus.org

About Changing Markets:

The Changing Markets Foundation partners with NGOs on market focused campaigns. Our mission is to expose irresponsible corporate practices and drive change towards a more sustainable economy.

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