**PRESS RELEASE**

# Fifteen percent of Brussels' friteries surveyed selling potato fries with high levels of known carcinogen

Brussels, 23 February 2017

**A snapshot survey of potato fries sold in twenty Brussels friteries has discovered three samples with levels of acrylamide, a known carcinogen, above the EU benchmark.**

A joint investigation conducted by Changing Markets and local news brand BRUZZ into the levels of acrylamide found that 15 percent of the Brussels establishments surveyed were selling potato fries with high levels of acrylamide, exceeding the European benchmark of 600 µg/kg.

Acrylamide is a known carcinogen and a proposal to regulate its content in food is currently being discussed in Brussels by the European Commission and Member States. This genotoxic chemical is found in many food products consumed by Europeans such as bread, coffee, biscuits, cereals, fried potato products and several types of baby foods.

The highest acrylamide level found in the survey was 670 µg/kg, over six times higher than the lowest at 100 µg/kg, followed by two samples at 660 and 620 µg/kg. Two samples were at 500 µg/kg – a new benchmark level being proposed by the European Commission. A sample taken at fast food giant McDonalds was above the average levels found in smaller friteries, at 450 µg/kg. Full results can be found in the table in the Annex.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) considers acrylamide in food a concern for public health and has identified potato fried products as the largest contributor to acrylamide exposure, which is of particular concern for young children [1]. European health authorities agree that acrylamide levels in food should be reduced as much as possible and industry can play an important role in these efforts.

Under the current protocol [2], Member States have been obliged to monitor levels of acrylamide in food products since 2007 and act when products are found at levels higher than the European benchmark. For potato fries, this has been set at 600 µg/kg, which is at the high end of concentrations observed over the years.

Nevertheless, data released by EFSA last year showed the current approach has failed to lower acrylamide concentrations across food products [3]. A recent study from the University of Liège suggests that acrylamide levels in potato fries served in catering facilities in Belgium are in fact increasing [4].

"*The results released today show that any approach to tackle acrylamide that relies on the food industry's self-regulation is destined to fail"* said Nuša Urbančič from Changing Markets. "*It's time for the Commission to put in place a robust legal framework that sets ambitious legally binding limits for acrylamide in food to ensure that business operators make real efforts to reduce its presence."*

A draft legislative proposal on acrylamide [5] is currently being discussed by the European Commission and Member States. This proposal fails to introduce maximum legal limits for acrylamide in food products and keeps the benchmarks at very high levels compared to what is technically possible. Instead, it mandates the application of codes of practice, developed by the industry – the approach that has been in place until now and has failed.

*"It's unclear whether the friteries that exceeded the acrylamide benchmark in our survey are unaware of this issue or are failing to implement good practices*" continued Urbančič. "*In any*

*case, low acrylamide levels in most of the "frites" tested show that consumers should be able to confidently enjoy their products, if companies take this issue seriously. We would especially encourage regulators to apply stricter controls on bigger companies that can adopt more measures to reduce the presence of this carcinogenic chemical."*

Several simple measures that friteries can implement to ensure lower acrylamide levels have been identified by the European Potato Processors' Association [6]. These include advice regarding which potato varieties should be favoured, how potatoes should be stored, how they should be cut and soaked before frying, how frequently the oil should be changed, and recommendations on length and temperature they should be fried for. The Commission's proposal applies the same rules to all food business operators in the hospitality and eating-out sectors equally, including taking an annual sample and reporting on the colour of the product, regardless of their size and turnover. This means that big corporations like McDonalds have to implement the same controls as small businesses.

**Notes:**


[1] EFSA's scientific opinion on acrylamide in food https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4104
[2] European Commission's Recommendation 2013/647/EU http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0647
[3] SumOfUs' report on acrylamide levels found in food in the EU https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/PASSING_THE_HOT_POTATO.pdf
[4] Claes, W. et al (2016) *Reassessment of the acrylamide risk: Belgium as a case-study.* University of Liège, Belgium. Journal of Food Control. Elsevier.
[5] European Commission's draft legislative proposal http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/Acrylamide-proposals-strengthened-in-new-draft
[6] The golden frying recipe http://goodfries.eu/en/rules/


**About the analysis:**
The samples were prepared and analysed for acrylamide by SGS Belgium NV in Antwerp (ISO17025 accredited laboratory). The analytical method was liquid chromatography–mass Spectrometry (LC-MS). The samples were taken in different establishments across Brussels in January 2017.

**About Changing Markets:**
Changing Markets is a foundation formed to accelerate and scale up solutions to sustainability challenges. Partnering with NGOs on market focused campaigns, we expose irresponsible corporate practices and drive change towards a more sustainable economy.
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**ANNEX – ANALYTICAL RESULTS**

| Sampling reference | Establishment | Acrylamide (µg/kg) |
|---|---|---|
| BRU13 | Snack Waterloo | 670 |
| BRU14 | Chez Clementine | 660 |
| BRU16 | Friterie Tabora | 620 |
| BRU12 | Fritterie Chez Palma | 500 |
| BRU15 | Fritland | 500 |
| BRU20 | McDonalds | 450 |
| BRU05 | Barière | 440 |
| BRU18 | Frit Flagey | 440 |
| BRU09 | De Corte | 380 |
| BRU17 | Manneken Frites | 270 |
| BRU21 | Frituur Ijzer | 260 |
| BRU22 | Frituur Pitta de la Chapelle | 260 |
| BRU03 | Friterie Antoine | 250 |
| BRU11 | Eugène | 230 |
| BRU19 | Sultans of Kebap | 230 |
| BRU10 | Friterie du Miroir | 180 |
| BRU06 | Friterie Fontainas | 150 |
| BRU07 | Le Dôme | 130 |
| BRU23 | Fritkot Bompa Friterie | 110 |
| BRU08 | Big Moustasje | 100 |

**Note to editor:**

Acrylamide levels vary according to the preparation methods and so these results may not be representative of other samples taken from the same establishments at a different time.

EU benchmark for fried potatoes is set at 600 µg/kg (products above in red). A lower benchmark of 500 µg/kg (products above in orange) is currently under consideration by Member States. There are no safe levels for acrylamide in food and health authorities agree that food businesses should make efforts for the levels to be as low as reasonably achievable. This table shows that the levels of acrylamide can be significantly reduced.