

## PRESS RELEASE

### High levels of carcinogenic chemical found in UK baby biscuits

London, 6 March 2017

**Ten percent of biscuits for infants and young children surveyed on sale in the UK have high levels of acrylamide, a known carcinogen, reveals a new study.**

The survey, commissioned by the Changing Markets Foundation, analysed 48 types of biscuits for infants and young children in the UK, including well-known brands Little Dish and Ella's Kitchen.

The highest levels of acrylamide were found in a sample of Little Dish biscuits for one-year-olds; these were found to contain a concentration of 924.4 µg/kg, almost five times above the European benchmark and 30 times higher than products with the lowest concentration.

Exposure of babies and young children to acrylamide is considered of particular concern by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) [1]; a recent study from the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) concluded that people in the UK currently consume higher levels of the chemical than is desirable and that the risk of cancer from acrylamide exposure is three times higher in infants than in adults [2].

**In total, four samples of similar products from the brand Little Dish exceeded the recommended EU benchmark (200µg/kg) while one sample from Ella's Kitchen came close to it (full results are available in the Annex). Changing Markets and SumOfUs' survey of baby biscuits in France found only one product - Nestlé brand – that had levels higher than the benchmark.**

Similar products sold in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria were recently recalled from the market for having levels of acrylamide at 1020 µg/kg [3].

**Today's findings come just six months after the FSA published its own monitoring results showing 29 products exceeding the recommended acrylamide benchmarks, including three types of baby foods [4].**

The FSA recently launched the Go for Gold campaign, focused on recommendations on how to reduce acrylamide levels through home cooking.

“While it is important not to burn your toast, the FSA seems to be shying away from taking a tougher stance on the food industry, where significant reductions of acrylamide are possible. We mustn't forget that acrylamide exposure from home-cooked food is considered relatively small when compared with industrially or restaurant-prepared foods [5]” says

Nabil Berbour, senior campaigner at SumOfUs, a global consumer watchdog whose petition asking the EU Commission to set legally binding maximum levels of acrylamide in food has gathered more than 229.000 signatures.

The presence of acrylamide, which is formed when starchy foods are heated up, can be significantly minimised by food business operators through the application of different measures [6], as confirmed by those samples with undetectable levels of acrylamide.

Nevertheless, many food operators are still unaware of acrylamide or unwilling to take measures to reduce the levels due to a lack of mandatory legal limits [7].

In response to this, a legislative proposal on acrylamide in food [8] is currently being discussed by the European Commission and Member States. This proposal has been heavily criticised by food safety and consumer protection groups because it fails to introduce maximum legal limits for acrylamide, which is the approach taken on other contaminants in EU law.

Such a weak proposal will prolong the *status quo*, where companies can continue to sell their products even when these are found to have high levels of acrylamide. The vote on the draft proposal is expected in June.

“It is a shame that the Food Standards Agency continues to support a weak EU proposal, which will prolong the current ineffective industry self-regulation”. said Nuša Urbančič, campaigns director at Changing Markets. “With this stance the FSA is passing the hot potato from the industry to the consumers, while it is becoming clearer that industrial foods with high levels of acrylamide are not an isolated case [9].”

#### Notes to editors:

- [1] EFSA’s scientific opinion on acrylamide in food  
<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4104>
- [2] FSA’s Total Diet Study  
<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fsis-2014-tds-acrylamide.pdf>
- [3] Member States take action to remove baby biscuits with high levels of acrylamide from the market  
[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/rasff-window/portal/?event=notificationDetail&NOTIF\\_REFERENCE=2016.1750](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/rasff-window/portal/?event=notificationDetail&NOTIF_REFERENCE=2016.1750)
- [4] <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/acrylamide-furan-report.pdf>
- [5] HEATOX project <http://heattox.org>
- [6] Food and Drink Europe’s Acrylamide’s Toolbox  
[http://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications\\_documents/AcrylamideToolbox\\_2013.pdf](http://www.fooddrinkeurope.eu/uploads/publications_documents/AcrylamideToolbox_2013.pdf)
- [7] <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/event/documentset/141210-p13.pdf>
- [8] European Commission’s draft legislative proposal  
<http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/Acrylamide-proposals-strengthened-in-new-draft>
- [9] SumOfUs’ report on acrylamide levels found in food in the EU

[https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/PASSING\\_THE\\_HOT\\_POTATO.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/PASSING_THE_HOT_POTATO.pdf)

**About the analysis:**

The samples were prepared and analysed for acrylamide by Fera Science Ltd in York (UKAS ISO17025 accredited laboratory). The analytical method was gas chromatography–mass Spectrometry (GC-MS), which has a reporting limit of 30 µg/kg. The samples were taken in different retailers across London in January 2017.

**About SumOfUs:**

SumOfUs is a global consumer group that campaigns to hold big corporations accountable. Over 12 million people have taken over 50 million actions worldwide with SumOfUs since it was launched.

[www.sumofus.org](http://www.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.

[www.changingmarkets.org](http://www.changingmarkets.org) / @ChangingMarkets

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## ANNEX – ANALYTICAL RESULTS

Sampling reference	Product description	Brand	Acrylamide (µg/kg)
UK(17)042	Tomato & herb mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	924.4
UK(17)041	Apple mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	652.3
UK(17)043	Coconut mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	571.3
UK(17)014	Cheese mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	445.7
UK(17)040	Vanilla mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	211.8
UK(17)002	Baby biscuits vanilla + bananas	Ella's kitchen	192.7
UK(17)005	Rice Cakes	Marmite	176.5
UK(17)015	Raspberry mini oat biscuits	Little Dish	158.5
UK(17)047	Parsnip + poppy seed savoury biccies	Ella's kitchen	116.1
UK(17)003	Baby biscuits apples + ginger	Ella's kitchen	110.9
UK(17)017	Rusks Banana	Farley's Rusks	106.5
UK(17)025	Mini Cheese crackers	Organix	103.5
UK(17)001	Carrot Wafers	Kiddylicious	98.4
UK(17)013	Mini gingerbread men biscuits	Organix	95.6
UK(17)030	Gingerbread Men biscuits	Organix	93.2
UK(17)008	Alphabet Biscuits	Organix	92.1
UK(17)007	Strawberry baby biscuits	Organix	86.4
UK(17)027	Apple rice cakes	Organix	82.1
UK(17)021	Apple flavoured biscuits	Boots Toddler Organic	69.5
UK(17)031	Animal Farm biscuits	Organix	68.4
UK(17)020	Banana flavoured biscuits	Boots Toddler Organic	65.4
UK(17)022	Rice cakes	Boots Baby Organic	60.2
UK(17)035	Chocolate biscotti	HEINZ	53.3
UK(17)011	Golden multigrain biscotti	HEINZ	52.6
UK(17)037	Banana biscotti	HEINZ	48.1
UK(17)039	Wafer wisps spinach, apple & kale	Heavenly	47.6
UK(17)033	Banana wafers	Kiddylicious	42.3
UK(17)004	Apple biscotti	HEINZ	37.4
UK(17)024	Apple flavoured Rice cakes	Boots Baby Organic	37.2
UK(17)044	Apple rice cakes	TESCO	36.4
UK(17)048	Cheese + leek seed cruchy weels	Ella's kitchen	33.3
UK(17)045	Apple & Raspberry rice cakes	TESCO	32.7
UK(17)029	Raspberry & blueberry rice cakes	Organix	32.3
UK(17)012	Strawberry and Banana biscotti	HEINZ	31.8
UK(17)036	Mango and apricot biscotti	HEINZ	31.2
UK(17)016	Rusks Original	Farley's Rusks	30.7
UK(17)006	Banana baby biscuits	Organix	<30

UK(17)009	Rice Cakes Pear & Berries	Cow & Gate	<30
UK(17)010	Rice Cakes Apple & Orange	Cow & Gate	<30
UK(17)018	Rusks Reduced Sugar	Farley's Rusks	<30
UK(17)019	Mini Rusks	Farley's Rusks	<30
UK(17)023	Orange flavoured Rice cakes	Boots Baby Organic	<30
UK(17)026	Mini Oaty bites	Organix	<30
UK(17)028	Banana rice cakes	Organix	<30
UK(17)032	Creamy vanilla baby biscuits	Organix	<30
UK(17)034	Blueberry wafers	Kiddylicious	<30
UK(17)038	Fruity bakes apple flavour	annabel karmel (Disney)	<30
UK(17)046	Banana + raisin oaty fingers	Ella's kitchen	<30

**Note to editor:** EU benchmark for baby biscuits is set at 200 µg/kg (products above in red) 2013/647/EU. A lower benchmark of 150 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 the industry 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.