Baby biscuits with high levels of known carcinogen found on sale in France

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A snapshot survey of a range of biscuits and rusks for babies and infants on sale in France shows that products with high levels of acrylamide, a known carcinogen, continue to be placed on the market. Recently, several similar products sold in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria were recalled from the market due to high levels of acrylamide.

A number of laboratory tests conducted on behalf of the Changing Markets Foundation show that babies and young children continue to be exposed to food products with concerning levels of acrylamide, at levels close and above the European benchmark. The highest acrylamide level was found in a sample of biscuits aimed at 12-month-old babies from the Nestlé brand, which was above the European level of 200 µg/kg and seven times higher than those products with the lowest concentration. Two samples of similar products from the Picot and Carrefour brands were found to have concentrations very close to the European benchmark. In recent months, similar products sold in Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria were recalled from the market for having high levels of acrylamide [1].

Acrylamide is a carcinogenic chemical found in many food products consumed by Europeans such as bread, coffee, biscuits, cereals, potato products and several types of baby foods. Exposure of babies and young children to acrylamide is particularly worrying as the European (EFSA) and the French Food Safety Authorities (ANSES) estimate it to be close to levels of concern [2].

Under the current protocol [3], Member states have been obliged to monitor levels of acrylamide in food products since 2007 and take action when products are found at levels higher than the European benchmark. For biscuits and rusks for babies and young children, this has been set at 200 µg/kg, which is at the high end of concentrations observed over the years.

“It is unacceptable that even major brands do not seem to be taking full responsibility to reduce acrylamide levels in their products ignoring the long-term health impacts these could have on most vulnerable consumers such as babies and young children” said Véronique Moreira, president of WECF France. “These findings highlight the urgency to put in place a robust EU regulatory framework so that food operators make real efforts in lowering acrylamide levels across their products.”

A draft legislative proposal on acrylamide [4] is currently being discussed by the European Commission and Member States. This proposal fails to introduce maximum legal limits for acrylamide even for baby food products, contrary to the approach taken on other contaminants in EU law, and it keeps the benchmarks at very high levels compared to technically feasible reductions observed. The vote on the draft proposal is expected in March.

“France should follow recent actions from other Member States and ensure products with high levels of acrylamide are no longer being placed on the market, particularly as EFSA data released to SumOfUs [5] demonstrated that sales of such products are not an isolated case” said Nabil Berbour from SumOfUs, a mobilisation movement of consumers/workers/investors whose petition on this matter has reached over 209,000 signatures [6] “France should take due note of the concerns raised by ANSES and put people’s health before the profit of corporations by asking the European Commission to set ambitious legally binding levels for acrylamide in food products as soon as possible.”

Notes:

[1] 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
[2] EFSA's scientific opinion on acrylamide in food https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4104
ANSES' study on exposure to dangerous chemicals in children's diet:
https://www.anses.fr/fr/node/124298
[3] European Commission's Recommendation 2013/647/EU
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0647
[4] European Commission's draft legislative proposal
http://www.foodnavigator.com/Policy/Acrylamide-proposals-strengthened-in-new-draft
[5] SumOfUs' report on acrylamide levels found in food in the EU
https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/PASSING_THE_HOT_POTATO.pdf
[6] SumOfUs' petition on acrylamide https://actions.sumofus.org/a/eu-protect-our-food-safety

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 in Nantes in January 2017.

About WECF France
French organisation part of the WECF Network alongside with 150 member organisations and individuals who share a common concern to promote a just and healthy planet for all, strengthen the role of women and promote a gender and rights based approach in environment and sustainable development policy and implementation. In order to reach its goals WECF implements projects in partnership with local organizations in 50 countries.
http://www.wecf.eu/francais/

About SumOfUs
SumOfUs is mobilisation movement of consumers/workers/investors who want to make big corporations accountable. 12 million individuals have acted more than 50 million times everywhere in the world since SumOfus was created.
https://www.sumofus.org/fr/

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	Product description	Brand	Acrylamide (µg/kg)
FR2.018	P'tit Biscuit texture croquante et fondante (+12 mois)	Nestlé	226,1
FR2.023	Mes 1ers Biscuits Orange (+10 mois - AB)	Picot	198,3
FR2.007	Biscuits Junior aux pépites de chocolat (+18 mois)	Carrefour Baby	192
FR2.016	Biscuits adaptés à bébé (+10 mois)	Leclerc	135,5
FR2.025	Biscuits Pépites de chocolat (+18 mois)	U	126,3
FR2.017	Mes petits biscuits, arôme naturel de vanille (+10 mois - AB)	Leclerc	105,3
FR2.001	Biscuits bébé - mon petit goûter (+12 mois)	Auchan	103,2
FR2.005	Mon 1er biscuit chocolat (+12 mois)	Blédina	101,5
FR2.020	P'tit Biscuit Pépites de chocolat (+15 mois)	Nestlé	100,6
FR2.009	Biscuit croissance à la pomme (+12 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	96,3
FR2.003	Petits Boudoirs à l'huile essentielle d'orange douce (+8/10 mois - AB)	Babybio	93,6
FR2.008	Mini-galettes de riz à la pomme (+10 mois - AB)	Good Goût	72,8
FR2.019	P'tit Biscuit texture ferme et fondante (+10 mois)	Nestlé	39
FR2.024	Mon premier biscuit (+10 mois)	Pomette	37,2
FR2.006	Biscuits fondants (+10 mois)	Carrefour Baby	30,5
FR2.002	Biscuits tendres - mon petit goûter (+10 mois)	Auchan	<30
FR2.004	Mon 1er boudoir (+10 mois)	Blédina	<30
FR2.010	Mon premier biscuit (+6/12 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.011	Galettes de riz à la myrtille (+10 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.012	Galettes de riz à la framboise (+10 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.013	Barre Pommes, Bananes et céréales (+12 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.014	Barre Pommes, Fruits rouges et céréales (+12 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.015	Petites biscottes (+6/12 mois - AB)	Hipp Biologique	<30
FR2.021	Mes 1ers boudoirs Vanille (+8 mois)	Picot	<30
FR2.022	Mes 1ers boudoirs sans lait (+8 mois)	Picot	<30

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