



NGOs fury over Commission draft proposals on acrylamide

NGOs have strongly criticised the European Commission's draft proposals to tackle acrylamide in food, saying they do not go far enough to protect public health.

In a letter to First Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, and Health and Food Safety Commissioner, Vytenis Andriukaitis, the NGOs call for binding maximum levels in different food categories.

They criticise the Commission draft for proposing indicative values which exist today and are lower, in some cases, than national targets in Denmark and Germany.

"It is deplorable that such an important dossier is being managed by the European Commission via a targeted/accelerated consultation over the month of August involving mainly the food industry," said SAFE safe food advocacy Europe, Corporate Europe Observatory and WeMove.EU.

In the letter, which is copied to MEPs in the Agriculture and Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, the NGOs call for a new draft which would really reduce exposure to acrylamide, a naturally forming contaminant in certain foods heated to a high temperature.

"The indicative values need to be considered maximum admissible levels, pending further research, and member states must be given the freedom to adopt stricter measures if they prefer," says the letter.

NGOs also call for the best practice codes for industry to be based on the work of public food safety authorities, "rather than exclusively relying on codes developed by industry lobby groups".

They call for a clear role to be given to national food safety agencies in different member states to monitor and control the application of maximum binding levels of acrylamide.

The European Food Safety Authority has said that acrylamide increases the risk of cancer, in one of its most clearly worded Opinions to date. However, so far, no legislation has been agreed.

Codes of practice

The European Commission draft proposal refers to codes of practice developed by FoodDrinkEurope, the International Association of Plant Bakers, and the hospitality industry and small and micro food businesses (UEAPME).

It says that companies should use the codes of practice to reduce the presence of acrylamide using the indicative values and carry out frequent sampling to confirm the effectiveness of the codes.

Business operators have to provide "evidence of regular testing" of their products.

Mitigation measures have been developed by the food industry for products such as chips, crisps, cereal based products, breakfast cereals, coffee, baby biscuits and baby food as well as bread and coffee substitutes.



For potato-based products such as crisps and French fries, samples must be tested for acrylamide at least once every three months. For cereal-based products, including bread, the testing is more frequent - once a month.

However, the industry has strongly opposed this frequency of testing.

The indicative values include 600ug/kg for French fries, 1,000ug/kg for potato crisps, 80ug/kg for wheat based bread, and 200 to 400ug/kg for breakfast cereals and 450ug/kg for roast coffee.

The letter from NGOs is also copied to senior staff at DG SANTE.

It expresses particular concern about exposure of children.

In the draft Commission proposal, the limits on baby food are 50 to 80ug/kg acrylamide depending on the type, 200ug/kg for rusks and 50ug/kg acrylamide for processed cereal based infant foods.

The European Commission has said it is taking the ALARA approach - the lowest reasonably achievable level - rather than set maximum levels.

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