

Food and Feed Crisis Coordinators meeting
of 9 October 2020 on
high levels of ethylene oxide detected in sesame seeds imported from India
Summary record

The meeting took place remotely with audio/video conference system.

Participants:

- *all Member States represented except LV, HU and AT*
- *CH, IS and NO*
- *Commission services : SANTE G4 (chair), G3, E4, E2, O2, D1, D3, F1*
- *EFSA*
- *EURL for residues of pesticides*

Discussion

The Commission welcomed the group, explained the context of the meeting following notifications of high levels of ethylene oxide being found in sesame seeds imported from India.

Sesame seeds may only be placed on the market in the EU when they comply with the MRL of 0.05 mg/kg, set at the limit of quantification.

The Commission summarised the state of play of the situation, based on the latest data available in RASFF, where Member States notified severe exceedances of the MRL and a risk to consumers.

The incriminated sesame seeds and/or their derived products were distributed to 24 Member States and 9 Third Countries, mainly from BE (main EU entry point for Indian sesame seeds) and NL.

BE, who originally notified the issue in RASFF on 9 September 2020, gave an overview of the actions taken so far in terms of analysis performed on batches and management measures implemented. BE confirmed that many batches are non-compliant as the use of ethylene oxide seems to be very frequent in India. BE informed also that a trader has also been blocked preventively. All information is shared in RASFF by BE.

NL informed about all the withdrawal/recall actions carried-out. A close collaboration with Dutch processing companies has been established to address the issue.

Several other Member States took the floor to inform about management measures taken following the RASFF notifications. Some of them called upon for a reinforced vigilance on other products like pepper and spices for which past analysis also showed presence of ethylene oxide.

The group also discussed the analytical capacities for detecting ethylene oxide and its degradation products (in particular 2-chloroethanol), the relevance to mandate EFSA for a harmonised risk assessment and the future actions that should be directed to future imports of sesame seeds from India.

Conclusion

- 1. All Member States present confirmed that they have proceeded to the withdrawal from the market of the incriminated products and/or to their recall from the consumers when the products have reached that level. The Commission asked to continue following the issue carefully, to implement swiftly any additional withdrawals/recalls that would be necessary and to notify RASFF accordingly.
The Commission made it clear that any sesame seeds that exceed the legal limit of 0.05 mg/kg, or processed/composite products derived thereof, must not be marketed or maintained on the market and must therefore be withdrawn and/or recalled.***
- 2. As regards laboratory capacity and analytical methods, the EURL for residues of pesticides will circulate to the national reference laboratories and official control laboratories the list of laboratories which are able to perform the analyses. Furthermore, attention will be given to developing official analytical methods as part of the EURL work programme for 2021.***
- 3. The meeting did not conclude on the need for an EFSA opinion as it would not necessarily help dealing with the issue in the short term considering the scarcity of data available, while Member States showed readiness to share the data they have available. Any mandate to EFSA should be very specific with very precise questions.***
- 4. Member States called for short term measures on sesame seeds imported from India. The Commission intends to propose requiring prior testing by India of sesame seeds intended for exports to the EU for compliance with the MRL for ethylene oxide, confirmed by an official certificate that would accompany the consignments, and imposing increased controls on sesame seeds coming from India at border control posts checking 50% of consignments presented at the EU border.***

The Commission closed the meeting indicating a follow-up meeting could be organised if need be.