



FOOD INDUSTRY POSITION STATEMENT ON USE OF BIOCIDES TO ASSURE FOOD HYGIENE AND SAFETY

10 March 2016

Biocides (disinfectants and sanitisers) are used routinely both in food production and in the home to prevent microbiological contamination of our food and water. Biocides are extremely important in the production of high quality safe food, contributing vitally to food safety standards and helping to protect the consumer.

Biocidal products are used throughout the food supply chain both in industry and in the home; they are used in hand washing from the field onwards, in products to clean equipment from harvest, in packhouses and in food manufacture, to clean retail shelves and food preparation surfaces.

The European Commission has been looking at the level of certain biocidal active substances in foodstuffs. The UK food industry carries out extensive regular monitoring of foodstuffs, over and above any regulatory requirements, including for biocides. The presence of a biocide does not indicate that there is any risk to human health (which is quantified by the Acute Reference Dose) and the positive benefits of using biocides to prevent microbiological contamination need to be balanced with the need to set practical levels.

The UK food industry places an absolute priority on food safety. Food poisoning outbreaks are rare in the UK, which has, for example, consistently lower levels of listeriosis compared with other European countries. The combination of Good Agricultural Practices, hygienic preparation and packaging minimise the potential for contamination, and the use of biocides plays an essential role in maintaining high standards of food hygiene, as required by law.

The UK food production, processing and supply industry has stressed to both UK authorities and the European Commission the need to maintain the availability of an adequate range of effective biocides throughout the supply chain to not compromise food safety through an increased level of microbiological risk.

The safety and quality of food is paramount to all. The food industry is working with the UK authorities and participating in discussions with the European Commission to ensure that food safety remains the key driver for any recommendations to change Maximum Residue Levels.

CHLORATES

Recently the European Commission has been considering levels for chlorates, which arise from the chlorination of water to make it safe to drink, and the use of chlorine based biocides including household bleach.

Under EU Regulation 396/2005 chlorate is classified as a pesticide although it is no longer approved for such use. A Maximum Residue Level of 0.01 mg chlorate per kilogram of food applies. The Commission is proposing new levels which will be consulted upon during 2016.

The UK food industry believes that a proportionate, risk-based approach to setting Maximum Levels should be taken which takes into account the absolute need to protect consumer safety and comply with food hygiene law whilst allowing industry to retain the use of chlorine based biocides to reduce microbiological contamination.

A Maximum Level set at the limit of detection would be impractical, in particular with regard to the extensive use of drinking (mains) water for irrigation, washing and transportation of fresh produce, as an ingredient in foods such as baby foods, soups, sauces, stocks, drinks, dried products in which water has been used in manufacture and subsequent preparation including infant and follow-on formulae, and other foods for infants and young children. It would also result in food having to be destroyed for no safety reason, causing waste.

Food and drink bodies and biocide manufacturers are liaising in particular on the development of the European Commission's position with regard to its future review of all biocides currently permitted for use in food and feed under the EC Biocidal Products Regulation.

Notes

- Biocide:** A chemical substance or microorganism intended to destroy, deter, render harmless, or exert a controlling effect on any harmful organism by chemical or biological means.
- Cleaning:** The removal of food residues, dirt, grease and other undesirable matter. This requires physical energy, heat and/or chemicals (detergents). Cleaning only removes dirt from the surface but does not kill all bacteria.
- Detergent:** A chemical used to remove grease, dirt and food, such as washing-up liquid.
- Disinfectant:** A chemical that reduces bacterial numbers to safe levels.
- Disinfection:** The reduction of the number of microorganisms in the environment, to a level that does not compromise food safety or suitability.
- Sanitiser:** Chemical that acts as both detergent and disinfectant.