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For feed and food law enforcement, and port health authorities in England

Action required related to non-approved Ethylene Oxide in sesame seeds and products containing sesame seeds

Summary: A number of batches of sesame seeds from India have been found to have a pesticide, ethylene oxide, present which can be harmful and is not approved for use on food in the UK or the EU. The FSA is asking businesses which have received batches of potentially contaminated sesame seeds to withdraw any products containing them from sale. Local authorities will need to assist in the matter as required. This issue has been subject to large scale action across the EU with numerous Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food (RASFF) alerts issued. The UK has been included in some of these RASFF notifications and action is already underway.

Dear Colleague,

The FSA requires assistance from local authorities (LAs) on withdrawal of products which may be contaminated with ethylene oxide. The FSA has received a number of RASFF alerts concerning affected products on the UK market and have been notifying LAs where the RASFF concerns a business in their area. The FSA requests LAs to contact businesses to verify withdrawal of product and ensure appropriate disposal where there is known distribution. Businesses should also notify LAs where they believe one of their products is affected; if a business notifies an LA that one of their products is affected, the LA should then notify the FSA.

The FSA is not advocating a full consumer recall of affected products as the risk to individual consumers is low and the majority of products already purchased are likely to have been consumed, making a full recall disproportionate. Nevertheless, we are aware that some businesses are recalling products and, whilst this is a business decision, when businesses do undertake a product recall we would request they notify the LA and the FSA and provide information according to the usual recall notification process. At present the FSA has no plans to publish product recall information notices (PRINs), to mirror

business recalls on food.gov.uk, as our policy for this incident is for product to be withdrawn from sale without the need for a product recall.

Other EU countries may be adopting other approaches but FSA risk assessment and risk management advice is based on our own assessment of the risk.

We are requesting that food businesses respond promptly to any notifications or instructions from suppliers, or LAs, to withdraw products from the market and, when asked, to provide other information in relation to the incident.

We are also advising businesses that believe they may be affected to inform their LA.

Risk assessment summary: Based on the likely level of exposure through the consumption of affected foods, the risk to consumers is low and the likely level of exposure from affected products is low. However, any risk would increase with higher levels of exposure or exposure over a longer period of time. The advocated product withdrawal in this case will reduce the period of potential exposure.

What actions have the authorities already taken (including enhanced measures)?

As already stated, the FSA is working to contact businesses and their LAs, who have received potentially affected products to verify that products have been withdrawn from sale.

Some of the affected products have not been directly imported into the UK and have been distributed through countries in the EU. A number of European food alerts have been issued to make businesses in other countries including the UK aware.

Regulation 2020/1540 amending Regulation 2019/1793, which came into force on 26 October, makes additional requirements for imports into the EU and UK of sesame seeds originating from India. Sesame seeds, which are already listed in Annex II to Regulation 2019/1793 for Salmonella testing, will now require testing for pesticide residues and in particular for ethylene oxide; it also introduces the stipulation that consignments of seeds originating from India must now be accompanied by a health certificate to the effect that they do not contain ethylene oxide.

Can affected bakery products be used for animal feed ?

Based on a conservative assessment, although it appears that a risk associated with the transfer of residue from feed into animal products cannot be excluded, any risk is likely to be low. However, if any affected bakery waste were to be used in animal feed products, producers will still need to ensure compliance with the default MRL of 0.02 mg/kg for ethylene oxide in feed. We will be holding further talks with the feed industry to determine whether this is achievable.

Why a withdrawal and not a recall?

A withdrawal is believed to be the most proportionate approach because the risks relating to this incident are assessed as low. The low risk is due to the fact that exposure is over

a short period of time; exposure from affected goods in this instance should be minimal, as consumption levels are expected to be low (with the majority of products likely already consumed), and the measures now being put in place will avoid the likelihood of repeated exposure.

We appreciate your co-operation in this matter.

Please contact foodincidents team at foodincidents@food.gov.uk if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'RUBHI'.

Rajwinder Ubhi

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