

9th May 2008

Reference: ID: 14121

Presence of mineral oil in sunflower oil from Ukraine

Dear Stakeholder,

The FSA initially became aware of the issue related to the finding of the presence of significant levels of mineral oil in sunflower oil from Ukraine through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) in April. Initial investigations by the European Commission and the Food Standards Agency indicated that none of the affected batch of sunflower oil from the Ukraine was directly distributed in the UK. However, the Agency has now been informed that some products containing the affected sunflower oil may have entered the UK via other EU Member States.

The affected sunflower oil contains mineral oil in breach of European food law. However, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which has conducted a risk assessment of the product and concluded that consumption of the contaminated sunflower oil is not expected to be of concern to public health. EFSA considered the toxicological risks on the basis of the limited data available and believes that the estimated exposure to consumers, including UK consumers, represents 10 to 20% of the acceptable daily intake for the type of mineral oil involved as set by international health organisations.

The EC has subsequently issued recommendations to the Member States in receipt of contaminated sunflower oil from Ukraine and food products containing more than 10% of the contaminated sunflower oil to take the following measures:

- withdraw all contaminated sunflower oil originating from Ukraine (or mixtures containing contaminated sunflower oil from Ukraine) from the market,

- withdraw food products containing more than 10% contaminated sunflower oil originating from Ukraine (or mixtures containing contaminated sunflower oil from Ukraine) from the market, unless it can be demonstrated that the food product contains less than 300ppm mineral oil. This has to be demonstrated by analysis of the food product or by calculation based upon the incorporation percentage of the sunflower oil and the level of mineral oil in the used batch of refined sunflower oil (traceability needed).

These recommended measures also apply to food products not yet placed on the market but produced before 25 April 2008.

The Agency is investigating how much of the affected products, which include sunflower oil for cooking and jars of various food products in sunflower oil, is or has been on sale and is asking the UK companies involved to remove the products from the market as a precaution.

In case of any further distribution to the UK of the affected sunflower oil and food products containing more than 10% of the affected sunflower oil, the FSA advises that these products are withdrawn from trade in line with the above-mentioned recommendations from the European Commission.

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