Maximum levels of hydrocyanic acid

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New maximum levels for hydrocyanic acid on linseed, almonds and cassava apply from 1 January

Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1364 of 4 August 2022 amending Regulation (EC) No 1881/2006 as regards maximum levels of hydrocyanic acid in certain foodstuffs

Update

On 4 August 2022, the Commission published Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1364 establishing maximum levels for hydrocyanic acid for linseed, almonds and cassava.

Impacted products

linseed, almonds, cassava

What is changing?

The Regulation introduces maximum levels as set out in Table 1 (and maintains the existing level for apricot kernels).

Why?

In 2019, EFSA updated its scientific opinion on health risks related to the presence of cyanogenic glycosides (bioactive plant products derived from amino acids) in foods, establishing an acute reference dose (ARfD) of 20 µg cyanide per kg body weight (EFSA CONTAM Panel 2019). It found that if certain foods are consumed that contain high levels of cyanogenic glycosides, such as linseed, almonds and cassava, the ARfD for cyanide could be exceeded.

Hydrocyanic acid is not normally present in these foods at toxicologically relevant levels, but when these foods are chewed or processed, cyanogenic glycosides form a mixture that has health risks. When linseed is ground, the bioavailability of hydrocyanic acid is greater. The Commission therefore considers that maximum levels must be set for these foodstuffs.

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Timeline

Date of publication: 8 August 2022

Date of application: 1 January 2023

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

Increased controls of hydrocyanic acid should be anticipated in 2023 due to these new maximum levels, and a number of findings of high levels of cyanide in linseed, almonds and apricot kernels (seven RASSF notifications to September 2022).

Recommended Actions

Suppliers of linseed, almonds, cassava and apricot kernels must verify the presence of hydrocyanic acid in products destined for the EU market, and ensure compliance with the new maximum levels by 1 January 2023.

Background

This Regulation amends the Annex of Commission Regulation (EC) No1881/2006 (subsequently replaced by Regulation (EU) 2023/915) that sets maximum levels for certain contaminants in foodstuffs.

Resources

Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/915 of 25 April 2023 on maximum levels for certain contaminants in food and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1881/2006

EFSA CONTAM Panel (2019) Evaluation of the health risks related to the presence of cyanogenic glycosides in foods other than raw apricot kernels. EFSA Journal, 17(4): 5662.

Sources

Commission Regulation (EU) 2022/1364

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Tables & Figures

Table 1
Maximum levels of hydrocyanic acid

Foodstuffs		Maximum level (mg/kg)	
		New	Current
8.3	Hydrocyanic acid, including hydrocyanic acid bound in cyanogenic glycosides		
8.3.1	Unprocessed whole, ground, milled, cracked, chopped linseed with the exception of foodstuffs listed in 8.3.2	250	–
8.3.2	Unprocessed whole, ground, milled, cracked, chopped linseed placed on the market for the final consumer	150	–
8.3.3	Unprocessed whole, ground, milled, cracked, chopped almonds placed on the market for the final consumer	35	–
8.3.4	Unprocessed whole, ground, milled, cracked, chopped apricot kernels placed on the market for the final consumer	20	20
8.3.5	Cassava root (fresh, peeled)	50	–
8.3.6	Cassava flour (tapioca)	10	–

Source: based on Regulation (EU) 2022/1364

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