



SUDAN I: Protecting Public Health

KEY POINTS

- **Sudan I in food can contribute to an increased risk of cancer but at the levels present the risk is likely to be very small. There is no risk of immediate ill health but it is sensible to avoid eating any more.**
- **The food companies are legally responsible for:**
 - removing from sale products that do not meet food safety requirements
 - notifying the Food Standards Agency and local authorities
 - advising their customers about product withdrawals.
- **The contamination of chilli powder has been widely publicised by the Food Standards Agency since 2003. Food producers are aware of the need to check the quality of ingredients supplied to them.**
- **The Food Standards Agency published an initial list of affected products on its website on Friday 18 February as soon as relevant information had been received from food companies. The list is being updated as further information becomes available. The Agency has told industry that a full list must be provided by Thursday 24 February.**

BACKGROUND

Sudan I is a red dye that is used for colouring solvents, oils, waxes, petrol, and shoe and floor polishes. It is not allowed to be added to food in the UK and the rest of the EU. However, inadvertent contamination of some food products has been uncovered.

Chilli powder contaminated with Sudan I was first identified in 2003. The powder originated from India. Since July 2003, all chilli products entering the EU must be tested for Sudan 1. The contamination has been widely publicised in the UK and affected products withdrawn from sale. The Food Standards Agency and local authorities randomly test over 1000 products a year for Sudan 1.

Premier Foods told the Agency on 7 February about the results of Italian testing that showed that a sample of Crosse and Blackwell Worcester Sauce had tested positive for Sudan 1. On Thursday 10 February, Premier Foods confirmed that a 5-tonne batch of chilli dating from 2002, and used to manufacture Worcester Sauce from 2004, was contaminated with Sudan 1. At this stage, five products were identified as affected. However, the scale of the problem began to emerge over the weekend of 11th to 13th February as it became clear that the Worcester sauce had been used as an ingredient in a wide range of other products. The Agency told the food industry that it required disclosure of the full range of affected products so that practical advice to consumers could be

provided. The food industry supplied information about affected products on the evening of 17 February and the Agency published the list of over 350 products the following morning.

Additional product information is being added as it becomes available. The Agency has told food companies to notify it of any remaining contaminated products by Thursday 24 February.

Why did it take so long for the Food Standards Agency to act?

The Food Standards Agency has acted to publicise this current problem as soon as it had practical advice to offer consumers. Information about products affected was received on 17th February and made public by the Agency on 18th February. The food industry has been aware of problems with chilli powder contaminated with Sudan I since 2003 and should have ensured that none of their ingredients contained the dye.

What is the risk to health?

There is no risk of immediate illness from eating Sudan I, but it could contribute to an increased risk of cancer. However, at the levels present, the risk is likely to be very small.

If the risk is so small, hasn't the Agency over-reacted?

Sudan I is thought to contribute to cancer and consumers should not be exposed to it unnecessarily. It is also illegal in foods. It isn't possible to quantify the risk, which is why it is sensible to avoid eating these products.

Doesn't this show that the FSA has lost sight of its main focus?

No. This incident shows that there are some food companies who are not complying with their legal responsibilities to sell food that is safe and fit for human consumption.

"A large range of foods appears to have been contaminated by Sudan I, so it is understandable that people will be concerned. The FSA's advice is not to eat the foods affected and Cancer Research UK agrees with this. However, people should not panic if they have already eaten foods on the list. The risk of cancer in humans from Sudan I has not been proven and any risk from these foods is likely to be very small indeed."

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK

Further information

- Further background information on Sudan 1 can be found on the Agency's website: www.food.gov.uk
- All affected products are listed on the website at: www.food.gov.uk/sudanlist
- Consumers can get information about withdrawn products from individual retailers and manufacturers