
Questions and Answers – Dioxin incident in Germany

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How did the incident start?

The incident started with the mixing of fatty acids, meant to be used for technical purposes (such as paper processing), with vegetable feed fat, which is used in the production of compound feed for animals. The fatty acids were contaminated with dioxins, and that is how the dioxins ended up in compound feed. The actual source of the dioxin contamination –i.e. why dioxins were present in the fatty acids– remains unknown for the time being.

The German authorities are currently conducting an investigation to determine how the contaminated fatty acids were mixed with the vegetable feed fat, since the fatty acids were not supposed to be used in the production of feed fat.

After the contamination occurred, contaminated feed was distributed to farms in several areas of Germany. As hens consumed the contaminated compound feed, higher levels of dioxins than those permitted by EU law were found in poultry meat and eggs.

How was the incident notified to the Commission? How does RASFF function?

The German authorities notified the Commission for the first time about the incident in the afternoon of December 27 through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) based on analytical results that the authorities had received a few days earlier. The original message referred to one consignment (26 tonnes) of contaminated fatty acids getting mixed with 500 tonnes of vegetable feed fat. The consignment originated in a biodiesel company and was delivered to a feed fat producer, where the mixing occurred. The contaminated fat was then delivered to nine feed manufacturers and the compound feed produced from the contaminated fat was delivered to about 40 farms. Consequently, all these farms were blocked.

This message, as all RASFF notifications, was relayed to all RASFF Members in the morning of December 28.

It is essential for food safety in the EU that a problem is notified through the system in time. A template allows Member States to provide all relevant and useful information such as identification of the product, hazards found, measures taken and traceability information of the product.

Once the information is received through the system, other Member States will verify if they are concerned. If the product is on their market they will be able to trace it using the information they find in the notification. They will report back to the RASFF on what they have found and what measures they have taken.

In case of products produced in EU, the Member State of origin will also report to RASFF the outcome of its

investigations into the origin and distribution of the product and the cause of the problem identified. This allows other Member States to take rapid action if required.

Was contaminated feed traded in other EU countries and/or exported to third-countries?

On Monday 3 January 2011, the German authorities found out that six other consignments of fatty acids from the biodiesel company were delivered to the feed fat producer. For precautionary reasons, the German authorities decided to consider all fat produced at the feed fat manufacturer since 11 November 2010 (approximately 3000 tonnes) as potentially contaminated. The German authorities notified that this potentially contaminated feed fat was delivered to 25 compound feed manufacturers in several German Lander. This potentially contaminated feed fat was then mixed into compound feed -at a ratio of 2% to 10%- for laying hens, fattening poultry, cattle and pigs.

The German authorities have inspected all 25 compound feed manufacturers and took samples for testing, the results of which are not yet available. As far as the competent authorities have been able to establish, no potentially contaminated feed fat and no compound feed produced with potentially contaminated feed fat has been delivered to other EU Member States or third countries.

Was any product coming from now closed farms traded in other EU countries and/or exported to third-countries?

More than 1000 farms have received suspect compound feed in several German Lander. The German authorities identified these farms and, as a precaution, they imposed restrictions on all farms. The restrictions will be lifted only when controls have demonstrated that the products are safe.

Tests on eggs and poultry meat from these farms showed increased dioxin levels. In some cases, dioxin in eggs exceeded the maximum level permitted by EU law up to four times. The German authorities recalled eggs from laying hen farms that were supplied with contaminated feed. No other products have been recalled so far. In North Rhine Westphalia 8,000 laying hens from an affected farm were culled and destroyed. No other German Land has applied this measure yet.

A total of 136,000 of potentially contaminated eggs have been delivered to the Netherlands to produce egg products. Some of these egg products have been traded after processing to the United Kingdom. No other deliveries of potentially contaminated foodstuffs to other member States and Third Countries are known up to now.

What measures have been taken at EU level in the past 10 years to tackle contamination by dioxin/PCB?

Maximum levels for dioxins have been established in 2001 in feed (feed materials and compound feed) and food of animal origin (fish, meat, eggs, milk and derived products). They are in force since 1 January 2002.

These maximum levels were complemented in 2006 with maximum levels for the sum of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in feed and food.

The animal by-products (ABP) Regulation, adopted in 2002 (Regulation (EC) 1774/2002), requires that ABP contaminated with dioxins (including animals and products of animal origin) are destroyed so that they cannot end up in the feed chain.

Minimum requirements for feed hygiene -which apply from primary production of feed (at farm level), through production, processing and distribution, to the point of feeding the animals- have been established by Regulation (EC) No 183/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 January 2005.

By this Regulation feed business operators have to put in place, implement and maintain procedures based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles. This means the identification of critical control points and the identification of, *inter alia*, possible chemical contamination.

Member States are required to ensure that controls are carried out regularly, on a risk basis and with

appropriate frequency by Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 (Official Feed and Food Control Regulation). These official controls must include controls on feed businesses.

What's next?

The European Commission is closely monitoring the situation with the German authorities and all relevant information related to this contamination incident will be immediately transmitted through the RASFF.

An update of the contamination incident will also be provided at the forthcoming meetings of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (the first time at the meeting of 11-12 January 2011).

The Commission services met on 5 January 2010 with the European Compound Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC) and other stakeholders involved in fats [the EU Oil and Protein meal Industry (FEDIOL), the European Biodiesel Board (EBB) and the European animal fat and animal by-product processors (EFPRA) to explore ways of further strengthening at EU level the monitoring of dioxins in the feed chain and, in particular, in oils and fats and their byproducts. Measures will also be considered in order to avoid that fats for technical purpose can be mixed with fats for feed and food. These measures should concern the production and transport levels.