

## The proposed EU maximum levels for non-dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls (ndl-PCBs) are still too high

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Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are some of the most dangerous environmental toxins. They were used in plasticizers, varnishes, transformers, or as hydraulic liquid. Their production and use has since been banned. Because of their longevity they still occur in the environment and are to be found in particular in fat-containing food of animal origin like milk, meat, eggs and fish. Out of the over 200 PCB compounds (congeners) there are only maximum levels so far on the European level for the so-called 12 dioxin-like PCBs (dl-PCBs), which at the same time encompass polychlorinated dioxins and furans. The European Commission is currently in the process of drawing up maximum level provisions for most PCBs, i.e. the so-called non-dioxin-like PCBs (ndl-PCBs). It envisages using as their representative the sum of six selected ndl-PCBs ( $\Sigma 6$ PCBs) that frequently occur in food.

The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) had already voiced an opinion on the first EU proposal for maximum level provisions from 2006 and indicated that the proposed maximum levels are too high. A new proposal is now available which the Institute has evaluated below.

BfR welcomes the fact that in the new proposal the maximum levels have been reduced for most foods and that fish liver and food for babies and infants has been included in the new proposal. One exception to this positive assessment is, however, the new maximum level for chicken eggs of 75 nanogram (ng)  $\Sigma 6$ PCBs per gram fat which, in contrast to the first proposal of 50 ng  $\Sigma 6$ PCBs per gram fat, has been set at an incomprehensibly high level. The maximum level for eggs should be oriented towards the maximum level for poultry meat where 30 ng  $\Sigma 6$ PCBs per gram fat was established as the maximum level and this is more than 50% lower, as the PCB contaminations in the fat portion of eggs and poultry meat are roughly the same.<sup>1</sup>

In the opinion of BfR the proposed maximum levels for  $\Sigma 6$ PCBs in food should, however, be lowered further as, with the exception of fish liver, all maximum levels are still far higher than the median PCB background contamination for the respective food. BfR recommends the introduction of trigger values for  $\Sigma 6$ PCBs in food which are to be established at between 25% up to 33% lower than the maximum levels in order to raise the level of protection afforded to consumers.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on [http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/vorgeschlagene\\_eu\\_hoehchstgehalte\\_%20fuer\\_nicht\\_dioxinaehnliche\\_polychlorierte\\_biphenyle\\_nd\\_pcb\\_sind\\_noch\\_immer\\_zu\\_hoch.pdf](http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/208/vorgeschlagene_eu_hoehchstgehalte_%20fuer_nicht_dioxinaehnliche_polychlorierte_biphenyle_nd_pcb_sind_noch_immer_zu_hoch.pdf)

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\* updated on 27 June 2008

<sup>1</sup> After the preparation of this Opinion, this concern of BfR was presented to the European Commission (DG SANCO) with the consequence that the proposal for the maximum level for chicken eggs was reduced to 50ng/g fat for  $\Sigma 6$ PCB.