

Recalled food is increasing: what is ethylene oxide and where is it found?

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The list of recalled foods due to ethylene oxide is getting longer and longer. More than 150 yogurts, kefir, and ice creams have already been recalled, among them a very large number labelled “Organic”.

The additive E410 locust bean gum, in which the presence of ethylene oxide has been found, is controversial. In fact, the carob flour was contaminated with ethylene oxide. Long-term exposure to products containing it can be harmful to human health.

What is Ethylene Oxide anyway?

Ethylene oxide is a carcinogenic substance that poses a risk to human health. “In the EU, the use of ethylene oxide in food production is not allowed, regardless of the method of production (organic/conventional). The maximum level of ethylene oxide residue is legally set at 0.05 mg/kg of food in the EU and represents the action limit with regard to food safety,” according to the NIJZ.

According to the Consumers Association of Slovenia, ethylene oxide is not a substance found on cotton swabs used in coronavirus tests. It has been used for a decade to sterilize such medical devices. However, its amount is so minor that its risk is virtually insignificant.

But it cannot be overlooked when ethylene oxide is found in food. It is also used as a pest control agent with a fumigation process. If this procedure is performed incorrectly, (too) large amounts of this substance can appear in food, which is now happening.

Why now?

We were interested in why such a mass recall now, whether the presence of this substance had not been checked before, and whether it was possible that someone had been consuming ethylene oxide-contaminated products for several years in a row. This is how the Ministry of Agriculture responded to us: “Ethylene oxide was not included in the EU monitoring program because it is not approved as an active substance for use in PPPs at the community level. However, its presence was checked by some Member

States as part of national monitoring mainly due to imports from third countries. Following the detection of sesame contamination with the aforementioned compound, both responsible operators and inspection services have tightened controls. From the EU Rapid Alert System for Hazardous Food and Feed (RASFF) data, it is evident that ethylene oxide residues also appear in other products: spices, herbs, additives, etc. Given the currently available data (findings of traceability checks), we cannot say that this has been going on for several consecutive years. In addition, not all foods/lots are non-compliant, so intake via several years of consumption of the same product is unlikely.

They ensured that this issue would not be repeated in the future due to increased control, but that unfortunately 100% safety could not be ensured in any area, even in the field of food safety.

What to do if we have a recalled product at home?

“Consumers are advised not to consume the food, but to return it to the place of purchase. An invoice is usually required to reimburse the purchase price,” the public relations department at the Ministry of Agriculture advises.

You can follow the list of recalled foods [here](#).