

COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR DIOXINS, FURANS AND PCBs

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Introduction

On 24 October 2001 the European Commission adopted a “Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on a Community Strategy for Dioxins, Furans and Polychlorinated Biphenyls” (COM(2001)593).

The Communication outlines the problem of dioxins and PCBs, the progress in addressing the problem, the remaining gaps, the basis for Community action and it develops a strategy to reduce the presence of these compounds in the *environment, in feed and food*. The strategy envisages to establish a coherent control strategy of the contamination in the environment which will - linked to a tighter control of the foodchain - contribute to a reduction of human exposure.

Summary of Communication

There is a general concern because dioxins, furans and polychlorinated biphenyls are a group of toxic and persistent chemicals that can cause severe and far-reaching environmental and health effects such as dermal toxicity, immunotoxicity, reprotoxicity, teratogenicity, carcinogenicity and endocrine disruption. Therefore in the past two decades the Commission proposed a lot of legislation with regard to dioxins and PCBs. This resulted in a substantial emission reduction. However, new elements highlighted the need for further action. These new elements, *inter alia*, are: *bioaccumulation* is continuing along the trophic chain and soils and sediments are reservoirs; *the toxic properties of dioxins and PCBs have been underestimated*: they have a broader impact on human health than previously was assumed even in very low doses, and in particular on the most *vulnerable* groups; *the dietary exposure of a considerable part of the EU population still exceeds* the Tolerable Intake established by the the Scientific Committee for Food (SCF) and Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee (JECFA); the Commission has *new obligations under international Conventions*; with the *enlargement* of the EU the average exposure is likely to increase.

To secure better protection of human health and of the environment from the effects of dioxins and PCBs an integrated and systematic approach is needed. To reduce *human intake* it is important to reduce the levels in the *foodchain* because food consumption is the most important route for human exposure (more than 90 % of total exposure). The most efficient way to reduce the levels in the foodchain is to reduce the *environmental contamination* by avoiding new releases in the environment and by addressing “historical pollution”.

The Communication proposes a Community Strategy for dioxins, furans and PCBs consisting of 2 main parts :

- a strategy to reduce the presence of dioxins and PCBs in the *environment*;
- a strategy to reduce the presence of dioxins and PCBs in *feed and food*.

The first part identifies actions in the short- to medium-term (foreseen in a timeframe of 5 years) focusing on sources and inventories, measurement methods and indicators, as well as Risk

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Management (prevention measures, control of emissions and control of the quality of the environment), Research, Communication to the public and Co-operation with third countries and international organisations. It also identifies long-term actions (foreseen in a timeframe of 10 years) covering Data Collection, Monitoring and Surveillance. This will provide a comprehensive picture of the environmental dioxin and PCB problem and a good understanding of the trend, which will permit further policy making and evaluation.

The second part proposes a strategy consisting of three pillars: establishment of *Maximum Limits* in food and feed, *Action Levels* acting as a tool for “early warning” of higher than desirable levels of dioxin in food or feed and *Target Levels* in feed and food to be achieved to bring exposure of a large part of the European population below the tolerable intake established by the Scientific Committees.

Follow-up

Council Conclusions

On 12 December 2001 the Environment Council adopted Conclusions on the Commission Communication in which it supports the Commission Strategy, stresses the need to involve the Accession Countries and requests the Commission to report on the implementation of the Strategy at the end of 2003 and thereafter every three years.

Progress on implementation of the “Strategy to reduce dioxins, furans and PCBs in the environment”

Following the high priority given by the Council to involve the Candidate Countries, the European Commission launched two projects and organised a workshop on this issue :

The first project entitled “*Dioxin Emissions in Accession Countries*” aims to evaluate and to build up a basis for a harmonised dioxin/furan emission estimation for Candidate Countries, as a prerequisite for effectively focusing the abatement measures. Together with the second project entitled “*Dioxins and PCBs : Environmental Levels and Human Exposure*” this will allow the first integral assessment on the extent of the dioxin-related issues in Candidate Countries. Identification of data and knowledge gaps will foster faster progress of Candidate Countries in this field. A secondary objective of the project is to contribute to the capacity building in Candidate Countries, which will be achieved by working closely with the officials and experts from those countries.

In June 2002 the European Commission organised an Expert Workshop on the “*Contribution of small sources to dioxin emissions in the candidate countries*”.

Furthermore, the European Commission funded the following studies and projects in the light of the implementation of the Community Strategy :

The project “*Preparatory actions in the field of dioxins and PCBs*” provides a systematic overview on contamination levels of dioxins and PCBs for important environment compartments, feedingstuffs and food. Furthermore the project gives an overview on sources, pathways, fate, occurrence levels and human exposure with respect to dioxins and PCBs and relevant brominated substances and discusses causal relations and consequences in light of the existing knowledge.

The study “*Dioxins and other POPs in by-products, recyclates and wastes and their potential to enter the foodchain-Stage IP*”, which will be published in October 2002, aims to fill the data gaps, identified in the first study (Stage I) on the subject of the re-use of contaminated waste in the feedingstuff production, by further research and data collection. The study will develop a sampling program and a sampling strategy in order to allow an appropriate monitoring in that field and it will also provide an important part of the information that is needed for defining to which extent the elimination of certain contaminated wastes going into feedingstuff might reduce the overall human daily intake of dioxins, furans and other POPs. The project will focus on the following potentially important by-products, recyclates and wastes that are used as components in feed production: 1)

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components from (olive) oil processing, 2) components from used oils and fats, 3) components from animal wastes, 4) components from industrial and agricultural wastes with high fibre content and 5) components from other potentially relevant types of waste.

The study "*Different open uses of PCBs and PCTs in products and determination of best available technology for the disposal of PCBs*" aims to allow EU Member States to identify materials and products in open uses, which contain PCBs and PCTs and to establish proper and adequate methods for the sorting and disposal of the materials and thereby reducing the release of PCBs to the environment, pursuant to Directive 96/59/EC. The results will be published in December 2002.

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