

codex alimentarius commission

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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Agenda Item 9

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS

First Session
Beijing, China, 16 - 20 April 2007

DRAFT MAXIMUM LEVELS FOR TIN IN CANNED FOODS (OTHER THAN BEVERAGES) AND IN CANNED BEVERAGES

Comments at step 6, in response to Circular Letter CL 2006/43-CF, by Brazil and European Community

BRAZIL

Brazil supports the proposed Maximum Levels for Tin in Canned Foods and in Canned Beverages.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) adopted the draft maximum level of 150 mg/kg in canned beverages and 250 mg/kg in canned foods other than beverages at Step 5 and advanced them to Step 6. The delegation of the European Community (EC) reserved its position on this decision.

The EC maintains its reservation for the following reasons:

1) Exposure assessment for toddlers and small children

The European Community proposes a maximum level of 200 mg/kg in 'canned foods other than beverages' and 100 mg/kg in 'canned beverages'. Acceptance of a higher level could lead to exceedance of the JECFA PTWI for certain vulnerable groups of the population (e.g. toddlers and small children).

2) Lower levels can be achieved by applying good practices

Available data have shown that the levels proposed by the European Community are currently already readily achievable.

In addition, the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted at its 28th Session in 2005 (ALINORM 05/28/42, Appendix V) the "Code of Practice for the prevention and reduction of inorganic tin contamination in canned foods" (CAC/RCP 60-2005).

In the preamble to the Codex General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Foods (CODEX STAN 193-1995 – rev 2-2005) one of the criteria mentioned to be applied for the establishment of maximum levels for maintaining a consistent policy in the matter is the following:

"Maximum levels shall be set as low as reasonably achievable. Providing it is acceptable from the toxicological point of view, maximum levels shall be set at a level which is (slightly) higher than the normal range of variation in levels in foods that are produced with current adequate technological methods, in order to avoid undue disruptions of food production and trade. Where possible, maximum levels shall be based on GMP and/or GAP considerations in which the health concerns have been incorporated as guiding principle to achieve contaminant levels as low as reasonably achievable."

Therefore the European Community is of the opinion that the availability of data on the presence of inorganic tin in canned beverages and canned foods other than beverages, obtained after the implementation of the recommended measures to prevent and reduce the presence of inorganic tin in canned foods as outlined in the “Code of Practice for the prevention and reduction of inorganic tin contamination in canned foods (CAC/RCP 60-2005) should be awaited before proceeding with the discussions on a maximum level.

3) High levels not needed for technological reasons

Tin is used to protect the steel base both externally and internally in contact with foods. The lacquering of cans significantly reduces the risk of tinplate corrosion and avoids tin dissolution.

The use of plain tinplate cans also serves a functional/technological purpose. The need for tin dissolution to maintain the desired colour and flavour attributes of products such as asparagus, light coloured fruits and tomato based products has long been established. The presence of tin creates a reducing atmosphere in the can and prevents undesirable oxidative changes in these products, which would otherwise develop brown discolorations and unacceptable flavours.

However, the level of tin needed for this functional/technological purpose is much lower than the levels discussed. In EU-legislation stannous chloride is authorised in canned and bottled white asparagus for this technological purpose at a maximum level of 25 mg tin /kg canned or bottled food.

Therefore the functional / technological need of tin for some canned foods does not provide a justification for the levels currently proposed to be forwarded to the Codex Commission for adoption at Step 8.