

Epax lowers dioxin, dioxin-like limits in omega-3

15/03/2006 - Norwegian omega-3 supplier Epax has introduced new maximum limits for environmental pollutant levels in its oils, which it expects will boost consumer confidence in products.

The company is now pledging that its [omega-3](#) concentrates – both triglyceride and ethyl ester – will contain no more than 5 pg/g of dioxins, furans and dioxin-like PCBs combined. Its previous specification limit was 7.5 mg/g.

Dioxins, furans and dioxin-like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are chemicals that occur almost everywhere in our environment. Bi-products of combustion, they can be created either naturally through events such as forest fires or through man-made processes.

Their ubiquity means they are found in edible fish and other animals, and can build up in the human body if too-high levels are consumed. High levels have been linked to a number of health problems, such as cancer, immune and nervous system disorders, liver damage and sterility.

The flip-side, however, is that omega-3, of which [fish oil](#) the best source, is gaining more and more recognition as an ingredient essential to human health. A plethora of studies have linked it to heart health, maternal and infant health and cognitive function.

This perceived play-off means that some consumers may be cautious about consuming fish and fish oil, and reassurances from legislators and industry about safe maximum levels can go a long way towards improving confidence and ensuring consumers do not miss out on the benefits.

Maximum levels of dioxins and furans in fish oil intended for human consumption in the EU were set in July 2002 at 2pg/g. Since then, however, more information has become available on dioxin-like PCBs, leading to the introduction of a combined limit of 10pg/g as of November 4 2006.

The European Commission has stressed that within this limit dioxins and furans must still not exceed the 2 pg/g limit.

In fact, the EC had envisaged introducing still tougher [dioxin](#) limits by the end of this year, but the introduction of the combined limits means that this has been pushed back until the end of 2008.

In the meantime, food and feed containing two-thirds of the new limits will trigger an action alert, leading to an investigation into the cause of contamination.

[Epax](#) CEO Bjorn Refsum said in a statement: *"Thanks to our unique two-step purification process, virtually all impurities and contaminants that can be found in fatty fish are removed."*

"This process is different from other available techniques since the oil entering the traditional concentration method of molecular distillation is already purified."

A spokesperson for the company told NutraIngredients.com that the change was based on its existing technology which has been optimised.

Last year Pronova Biocare and Croda both announced that they were lowering dioxin levels in their fish oils.

Epax announced its de-merger from former parent company Pronova Biocare earlier this month.

Yesterday Seven Seas announced that it is withdrawing a number of batches of its fish oil-containing supplements from the market in the UK after they were found to contain unacceptably high levels of dioxins.