

Dr Miguel Granero Rosell
Secretary, Scientific Committee on Food
DG SANCO C-3
Rue de la Loi 200
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Dear Dr Granero-Rosell

REQUEST FOR A REVIEW OF ASPARTAME BY THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON FOOD

As you may know, the UK Food Standards Agency has been in existence for a year now and food safety is our top priority. In this context, we continue to receive many enquires on the safety of aspartame from individual consumers and also from consumer groups. Additionally, there are many reports circulating on the Internet that claim that aspartame is responsible for a range of symptoms in consumers. These Internet reports often quote selected scientific articles that support their claims.

We are aware that it is now 13 years since the SCF last reviewed the published literature on aspartame, although one individual report was considered in 1996. Many other papers have been published since the SCF's last full review, both supporting and questioning the safety of aspartame. As described on the attached sheet, we have conducted a detailed literature search and discovered more than 500 papers on aspartame published between 1988 and 2000. A significant number of these are new studies that directly address questions of safety.

After food additives are approved, we believe that it is essential to monitor new publications and, where there is a significant body of new data, to re-evaluate each additive in order to provide the maximum assurance that additives are used safely. There is clearly sufficient new data on aspartame to justify such a review.

Since sweeteners are controlled by harmonised EC legislation which is drawn up with the advice of the SCF, it would not be appropriate for this type of review to be conducted at national level. We therefore request the Commission to place the review of aspartame on the agenda for the SCF, so that the Committee can consider the body of literature that has been published since it last evaluated this sweetener.

I would be grateful if you would let me know if the SCF is able to review the articles on aspartame published since 1988, and if so, inform us of the likely timetable for the review.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if anything is unclear.

Yours sincerely

Dr SANDY LAWRIE
Chemical Safety and Toxicology Division

cc Katia Neubauer DG SANCO D-3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using MEDLINE, TOXLINE and other data resources, we have conducted a thorough literature search of papers published on aspartame from 1988 onwards and have found approximately 500 papers. We have classified these under 9 main headings:

- safety
- exposure
- caries
- appetite
- general
- marketing and use
- analytical
- miscellaneous
- sensory properties

The papers are listed in the attached report, grouped by category. The safety papers have been further classified into those on neurotoxicity, carcinogenicity, mutagenicity and allergies (e.g. where allergic reactions have been reported). The list includes books, reviews, conference papers and also articles or letters written in response to other publications. The latter have been listed separately as 'comments' and the Reference number of the original article is given in the 'Related papers' column. The reference numbers do not run in sequence as papers dated before 1988 (the date of the last SCF review) have not been excluded from this list.

In a few cases, the search has identified articles whose precise relevance is unclear without referring to the original paper. These have been provisionally classified under the most likely heading, but with a "?" after the category name.

The list includes a paper by Olney et al. (Ref No. 413) that the SCF considered in 1996. A paper by H. J. Roberts (Ref No. 734) was mentioned in the reference list to the SCF's review on aspartame in 1988 (Reports of the SCF, 21st series). Both these papers have been marked as 'already seen by SCF'.

We have also provided the list in electronic form, as an Excel spreadsheet which includes abstracts (where these are available). The abstract is often truncated at 250 words due to limitations in the search programs. The same list, with abstracts, can also be provided as an Access database if necessary.

CST Division

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