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FSSAI releases draft food safety regulation for food products' packaging

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E-Paper

The Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has released a draft food safety regulation for the packaging of food products. It aims to adopt standards which will regulate different packaging components, such as plastics, glass, paper, printing inks, etc. across the packaging supply chain.

The draft standards are different from the existing version in terms of regulating components other than plastics, such as glass, paper, board, printing inks, etc. They also suggest different packaging materials against different food categories.

The standards specifically mention that the provisions stated in the regulations are also applicable to auxiliary food contact materials, such as paper plates, cups etc. and food for catering purposes. At a recent international packaging conclave conducted in association with Siegwirk, Kumar Anil, advisor, standards, FSSAI, mentioned that the upcoming standards will raise the bar for packaging safety.

Experts feel the same. Jatin Takkar, deputy manager, product safety and regulatory, Siegwirk India Private Limited, said, "Looking into the integrity of the drafted standards, there are several improvement opportunities to make it more robust and at par with the stringent global standards."

"However, the industry is evolving, and the standards that FSSAI is prescribing are definitely raising the bar for compliance," he added. "The drafted standards, obviously, will challenge the current capabilities of the partners in the packaging supply chain. It will also make them more capable in this continuous journey of food safety or packaging safety, as packaging has a primary function of protecting the food," Takkar said.

"If it is not regulated, it can actually make the food unsafe due to the migration of contaminants which can transfer from the printed surface to the food itself," he added.

Takkar said, "I would say that the drafted standards were the need of the hour. There have been several scandals across the globe, which have raised concerns on packaging materials' safety." "Adopting a new set of rules set for packaging safety will not only help the packaging industry to evolve in terms of food safety, but also in terms of operational and environmental safety," he added.

"The standards will also bridge the gap between regulations across the globe, and therefore, will deploy more opportunities for export," Takkar said. On the question of any difficulty for the food industry in adopting to the prescribed norms, he added, "In my opinion, I don't think there would be any major conflict arising out of the new drafted standards for the food industry, since the packaging supply chain partners are quite evolved and solutions are available in the market." "The IS standards,

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which have been adopted by FSSAI, have already been published by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) for years now, and supply chain partners are more or less aligned with the same. This is in more in context of ink manufacturers,” Takkar said.

Meanwhile, he opined that the standards needed to evolve with time with the increase in the awareness levels and capabilities of the packaging supply chain partners and the evolution of robust enforcement measures.

“I would say that there is definitely a long way to go when you compare to the European or American regulatory framework, but looking into the existing capabilities of the drafted packaging safety standards, it definitely sends out a positive message in terms of packaging safety. I don’t expect any major changes in the draft as it is all-encompassing,” Takkar said.

These regulations also listed out suggested packaging with respect to packaging for milk and milk products, fats, oils and fat emulsions, fruit and vegetable products, sweets and confectionery, cereals, meat, fish, sweetening agents (including honey, salt, spices, condiments and related products), and beverages (other than those which are dairy- and fruit- and vegetable-based).

The general requirements under the proposed regulations are as follows:

- Any material used for packaging, preparation, storing, wrapping, transportation and sale or service of food shall be of food-grade quality. Printing inks for use on food packages shall conform to IS: 15495 .The printed surface of the packaging material shall not come into direct contact with the food products .
- Newspaper, or any such material, shall not be used for storing and wrapping of food in containers once used shall not be reused for the packaging of food Food products shall be packed in clean, hygienic and tamper-proof bottles or containers

The requirements for the specific migration limit for plastic materials to be in contact with food products are as follows:

Contaminant	Maximum migration limit (mg/kg)
Barium	1
Cobalt	0.05
Copper	5
Iron	48
Lithium	0.6
Manganese	0.6
Zinc	25