

FSSAI issues testing notice after reported rotten areca nut smuggling

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E-paper

With reports surfacing of the smuggling of rotten areca nut (commonly referred to as betel nut) into India via Sri Lanka, FSSAI, India's apex food regulator, has issued a directive stating that now onwards, every consignment of areca/betel nut will be subjected to 100 per cent sampling and testing. The regulator specified that betel/areca nut, which is used in India as supari, shall not be cleared through the risk-based management system. FSSAI has also asked its officials at the importing ports to remain vigilant for any consignment carrying areca nut.

The reports suggested that a team of Directorate Of Revenue Intelligence seized a hefty consignment of rotten betel nut from Nagpur, Maharashtra. "The consignment was brought from Indonesia and smuggled to India via Sri Lanka," they informed.

Meanwhile, according to the FSSAI areca/betel nut is prone to developing fungi during the various stages of the processing, and therefore, a thorough investigation into its safety is needed to ascertain it.

Suneeti Toteja, director, imports, FSSAI, in her order, said, "Areca nut, the fruit of the areca palm, commonly referred to as betel nut, is prone to the formation of fungal growth during various stages of its production, storage and transportation."

"Accordingly it has been decided that the consignments of imported betel/areca nut shall not be cleared through the risk management system and all the imported consignment shall be subjected to 100 per cent sampling and testing," she added.

Risk assessments are resource-intensive, data-driven activities designed to provide risk managers with the ability to consider a range of mitigations that are intended to improve public health. There is no one way to perform the food safety risk assessment, and it varies according to the nature of the risk, the availability of data and other scientific evidences to answer specific risk management queries.

Currently, efforts are being made for pooling/sourcing of scientific data from research institutions, export agencies and other government organisations at the national level. The data collected would be helpful in carrying out risk assessment and surveillance plans.

"FSSAI officials deputed at the ports and other custom officials notified as authorised FSSAI officers have been asked to remain vigilant and strictly ensure the compliance of the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011 before clearance of the consignment," the order added.