

FSSAI fixes ad hoc limits for formaldehyde in fish and fishery products

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FSSAI has fixed the limits of formaldehyde in fish and fisheries products and issued a directive in this regard. The direction stated that the ad-hoc limit for formaldehyde in the food category of fish, including molluscs, crustaceans and echinoderms, shall be 2mg/kg for freshwater and 100mg/kg for brackish water/marine origin.

“These limits are for natural occurring formaldehyde, and this is a temporary arrangement made by the country’s apex food regulator, as the matter is still under consideration, and a final decision shall be taken in the due course of time,” said the directive.

Praveen Jargar, joint director, FSSAI, said, “The issue was examined by the concerned scientific panel of FSSAI, which has recommended a detailed assessment of the issue. However, taking into account the instruction of the Bombay and Goa High Courts, as well as the scientific concerns related with formaldehyde, it has been decided to set an ad hoc limit of naturally-occurring formaldehyde till final assessment is done.”

The directive said that the ad hoc limit shall be applicable till the panel recommended a final limit for the naturally occurring formaldehyde.

Experts also opined that the use of formalin artificially should be avoided as it posed health risks.

Ashok Kumar, head, fish processing division, Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Kerala, stated, “The use of formalin in fish and fisheries products should be avoided totally, and care should be taken to ensure that there should be no formalin in fish, while the use of artificial methods, including the use of formalin for increase in shelf life of fish should be avoided as fish laced with formalin can lead to adverse health conditions.”

It is pertinent to mention here that instances of adulteration of fish by using formalin (formaldehyde in water) have been reported from various places across India.

Also formalin is used to extend the shelf life of fresh and chilled fish and artificially improve the sensory attributes.

Last year, coastal states had imposed a ban on sale of formalin-laced fish. Also a programme called, Operation Sagar Rani was implemented to seize adulterated fish in Kerala.

Under this operation, fishing was banned in Kerala in the month of June. During this period, fish was being exported by Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. Around 9,600kg of fish preserved with the toxic chemical were seized at the border check post of Arayankavu in Kollam district, while 6,000kg were seized on June 24, 2018, from the check post at Walayar in northern Palakkad district. This led to an chaotic situation amongst the localites .

Around 21,600kg of formalin-laced fish was seized in the state under Operation Sagar Rani. The raids was been carried out by a squad of food safety officials from Kozhikode and Palakkad led by the state food safety commissioner.