

FSSAI to inspect & monitor fruits & vegetables for calcium carbide use

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FSSAI, the country's apex food regulator, has decided to conduct a detailed inspection, monitoring and sampling of fruits and vegetables for the use of calcium carbide. Traders in India have been using calcium carbide to ripen fruits in India. However, FSSAI has banned its use, because it poses serious health risks.

FSSAI issued an order in this regard, stating that the food safety commissioners of all states have been asked to initiate effective surveillance and enforcement activities to rule out the possibility of ripening of fruits by any banned chemical.

"To rule out any possibility of ripening the fruits with the aid of harmful and banned substances like calcium carbide or acetylene gas, the food safety commissioners of all states and UTs (Union Territories) have been asked to conduct surveillance and enforcement activities. They are also advised to do similar exercise for vegetables to check level of pesticides," said the order.

It is pertinent to mention here that FSSAI have been actively considering an alternative to calcium carbide use for the ripening process. And in August 2018, FSSAI has clarified that food business operators (FBOs) can use ethephon as a source of ethylene gas for artificial ripening of fruits instead of calcium carbide.

In addition to this, the apex regulator has also put out a detailed guidance note for the trader on artificial ripening of fruits.

Meanwhile, the order has also asked the state authorities to also conduct sustained awareness campaign in mandis for FBOs to avoid the use of calcium carbide for artificial ripening of fruits.

FSSAI stated that artificial ripening of fruits by substances like calcium carbide or acetylene gas pose serious threat to the health and Regulation 2.3.5 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011, provided that no person shall sell, or offer, or expose for sale, or have on his/her premises for the purpose of sale under any description, fruit which have been artificially ripened by the use of acetylene gas, commonly known as calcium carbide gas.

However, despite the prohibition on sale of fruits that have been artificially ripened, the traders often found selling such ripened products.