CIFT-FSSAI issue guidelines on usage of formalin in fish

Formaldehyde Is Banned As Per The Rules

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Visakhapatnam: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) have issued guidelines regarding formalin (formaldehyde) adulterant, which is rampant these days to artificially enhance the shelf life of fish during its inter-state transportation as well as for local consumption. Formaldehyde is banned for use in foods as per the Food Safety and Standards Regulations of 2011.

Consumption of fish adulterated with carcinogenic formalin can adversely impact health, causing abdominal discomfort, vomiting and kidney damage. Scientists have prepared these guidelines to alert consumers, traders and food testing laboratories on the best practices to avoid, restrict and detect formalin adulteration in fish.

Consumers themselves can check raw fish for adulteration by using a simple, rapid detection kit called ‘CIFTTest’, which has been developed by CIFT.

"Adulteration of fish with unapproved chemicals and additives are undertaken by traders and suppliers to extend the storage life of fresh or chilled fish and artificially improve the sensory attributes and present a façade of freshness. Monitoring studies by the FSSAI referral laboratory on fish and fish products and CIFT have reported the presence of residues of these hazardous chemicals like formaldehyde, ammonia and illegal use of additives like sodium benzoate in freshly marketed fish/fish products, inter-state fish consignments and even in ice used during transportation," said R Raghu Prakash, scientist-in-charge of CIFT-Visakhapatnam.

"Unavailability of good quality ice at harvest centres, inadequate insulation during domestic transport and lack of warehousing facility for bulk storage of fish are some of the reasons for rampant use of easily- procurable formalin in domestic fish marketing. Presence of these hazardous chemicals compromises health of consumers and needs immediate intervention from the enforcement agencies," he added.

As per the guidance note, consumers have been advised to wash all food thoroughly with running tap water to help remove formaldehyde to a large extent. Fish should also be washed thoroughly before cooking, which should be done properly in an internal temperature of 75°C or above, as heat from cooking can also aid the removal of volatile formaldehyde. Also, the flesh should be checked to see whether it has turned opaque and can be separated easily. Consumers can check raw fish for formaldehyde adulteration using CIFTTest.

The traders should refrain from using any unapproved chemical during any stage of storage, transport or supply, and ensure that cold chain or proper icing procedure is followed during inter-state transportation of fish. Food testing labs should ensure that fish samples collected for formaldehyde detection do not come in direct contact with ice. Edible portions of fish (muscle along with skin) should be used for analysis.