



FSSAI orders pan-India roll-out of Project BHOG for safe prasad at PoWs

Thursday, 15 February, 2018, 08 : 00 AM [IST]

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With a view to ensuring that devotees at places of worship (PoWs) are served safe prasad, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has ordered that Project BHOG, an initiative to encourage PoWs to adopt and maintain food safety and hygiene, be rolled out pan-India.

As per the order, the training of food handlers and vendors, both in and around the premises of PoWs, is an integral part of Project BHOG, which stands for Blissful Hygienic Offering to God (BHOG). Through this initiative, the country's apex food regulator aims to create awareness among PoWs to curb malpractices related to the food served and ensure proper regulatory compliance.

It is binding upon not only the vendors at every PoW where prasad is distributed, but also upon those in the vicinity of a POW who are engaged in the distribution of such offerings, to obtain a license from FSSAI, or register their establishments, and to adhere to the sanitary and hygiene practices laid down in the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011.

With the help of trainers from the Association of Food Scientists and Technologists of India [AFST(I)] and the backing of state governments, a series of training programmes has been conducted under Project BHOG in two states, namely Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Prabodh Halde, president, AFST(I), said, "It is good that the project is being implemented at a pan-India level. As per statistics, over 30 crore people visit places of pilgrimage every day. Thus it is imperative to take this project all over the country to safeguard the safety of prasadam."

"Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, food business operator (FBO) has been defined as any undertaking, whether for profit or not, and whether public or private, carrying out any activity related to any stage of manufacturing, processing, packaging, storage, transportation, distribution of food or import, and includes foodservice, catering services and the sale of food or food ingredients," he added.

"Thus, every pilgrim centre where food/prasad gets distributed falls under the definition

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of FBO and must adhere to the Food Safety and Standards Regulations, 2011, pertaining to food safety,” Halde said.

“Therefore, the need was felt to develop a simple document to aid in the understanding and implementation of the basic hygiene and process control steps that would help meet FSSAI’s requirements and ensure safe food is prepared and distributed to all devotees,” he added.

“The temples that have implemented these guidelines have shown good results since the confidence in their prasadam has increased and the labelling guidelines are being met for larger distribution,” Halde said.

The order, which stipulated that a nodal officer be nominated for the purpose, stated that in order to improve the level of food safety and hygiene in PoW pan-India, FSSAI recently organised a workshop, which was attended by as many as 66 delegates representing major PoWs from across India, state food and drug administrations (FDAs) and auditing agencies. The PoWs were sensitised and encouraged to adopt the project in their premises.

Halde stated, “So far, Project BHOG has been implemented in full swing in the states of Maharashtra in particular, as well as in Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh.”

“AFST(I) has made a short video about the project and an e-learning module is now being prepared for its easy implementation. It is expected that each pilgrim centre will register with FSSAI and implement the BHOG initiative,” he concluded.

Chandrashekhar D Salunke, joint commissioner, FDA Maharashtra, said, “About 3,500 people who are associated with the regulation and distribution of prasad in 300 temples across the state are being trained so far.”

A source from FSSAI said, “The response is very positive. It has increased the confidence in food safety. FSSAI has prepared detailed documentation for the implementation of Project BHOG, and the same has been uploaded on the regulator’s website.”

“Recently, over 30 temples participated in the BHOG workshop at FSSAI, Delhi. Many states are coming forward now, and with the help of the AFST(I) team and other scientists, Project BHOG is being implemented successfully,” he added.

In addition to imparting training, FSSAI has issued a guidance document on maintaining food safety and hygiene in places of worship to roll out Project BHOG in their premises. The document provides useful tips, dos and don’ts, methods and practices that should be followed to ensure safe and hygienic prasad.