

THE  NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Raid on Vijayawada fruit market: Rampant use of illegal chemicals found

Food safety officials destroy 20 tonnes of artificially ripened fruits during the inspection

Published: 12th May 2018 04:43 AM



Mangoes in the city| B P Deepu

ILL-EFFECTS OF CONSUMING ARTIFICIALLY RIPENED FRUITS

The most commonly used artificial ripening agent is calcium carbide which is commonly known as masala. It is a chemical compound and is produced on an industrial scale by heating a mixture of lime and coke in an electric arc furnace

Calcium carbide is a corrosive and dangerous chemical containing traces of arsenic and phosphorus hydride as impurities

The use of calcium carbide for artificially ripening the fruits are associated with serious health hazards

Ethylene gas can cause premature decay of some fruits and vegetables which are sensitive to it

The fruits ripened with the help of ethylene lack the characteristic flavour and aroma of a naturally ripened fruit

Ethylene can be explosive if it reaches high concentrations, so it has to be used cautiously

Consumption of fruits artificially ripened with calcium carbide causes stomach upset as the alkaline substance erodes the mucosal tissues of the stomach and disrupts intestinal functions

It may affect neurological system by inducing prolonged hypoxia

Artificial ripening is resorted to by the unscrupulous merchants with a view to achieving faster and more uniform ripening

How to identify naturally ripened fruits

They are attractive, but not uniformly coloured. It tastes sweet and pleasant and it has a long shelf life

Fruits artificially ripened by ripeners

These types of fruits are not very attractive, but uniformly coloured

The shelf life is short and black blotches appear on the skin of the fruit in two to three days

By Express News Service

VIJAYAWADA: As strict ban was imposed on using calcium carbide to artificially ripen mangoes, the fruit vendors at Kedareswararaopet fruit market in the city have opted to use ethylene sachets, which they get from China and other countries. The overseas imports of the harmful chemicals came to light when the officials of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and Vigilance and Enforcement carried out a joint raid at the fruit market in Vijayawada on Friday.

FSSAI IN NEWS

During the raid, the officials found fruit boxes containing ethylene sachets with a plant hormone solution sprayed on the mangoes. When Express asked the officials how the vendors were able to procure harmful chemicals, they said that vendors remained tight-lipped on the issue. “The fruit vendors are not spilling the beans on how they are managing to get the chemicals from foreign countries. We are suspecting the involvement of a network behind the supply of ethylene powder,” assistant food controller N Purnachandra Rao said.

It was found that the solution and ethylene stocks were discovered with workers at the shops in the market. Names of countries, such as China, were written on the containers where the chemical and solution were kept, the officials mentioned, indicating that they were supplied illegally. The food safety officials further expressed concern as it was observed in recent raids that counterfeit products with fake labels were all made in China.

“To analyse the chemicals, we have sent all the samples to the state food laboratory. Officials destroyed 20 tonnes of artificially ripened fruits during the inspection,” assistant food controller Purnachandra Rao said.

Cautioning about health hazards the artificially ripened fruits would cause, the assistant food controller said: “The lives of those who consume these fruits are at high risk because usage of the chemical ripeners could cause serious health problems like heart ailments and, even, cancer. Based on the report by the laboratory, stringent action would be taken against the vendors.”

Krishna District Collector B Lakshmikantham took the issue seriously and directed the officials concerned to register criminal cases against the traders who were found using artificial ripeners like calcium carbide, ethylene powder and other harmful chemicals.

Timeline of raids across the State

On May 8, food safety, vigilance and enforcement, agriculture and commercial taxes departments noticed that wholesale fruit traders in Tenali are using ethylene powder for artificial ripening of mangoes. Officials destroyed 22 tonnes of mangoes and collected 1,080 ethylene powder sachets from traders

On May 9, sleuths of food safety and vigilance cracked a whip on errant fruit vendors who found using banned calcium carbide powder for ripening of mangoes in Gudivada and Machilipatnam. Around 15 tonnes of artificially ripened mangoes were destroyed. On May 10, sleuths of food safety and vigilance raided mango orchards where traders are ripening the fruits by using ethipon liquid. 25 tonnes of mangoes were destroyed under the supervision of revenue officials.