

Formalin-laced fish: samples collected for tests

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Five samples collected from Varapuzha market and one from Thrikkakara

As complaints over the sale of formalin-laced fish continue to mount across the State, a team of food safety officials in the district collected six fish samples suspected of having the presence of the toxic chemical.

Five samples were collected from the Varapuzha fish market and another from a household at Thrikkakara. The drive was carried out by officials with the aid of a kit developed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT).

“Since the preliminary test using the kit pointed at the presence of formalin in all five fish samples collected from the market, we have decided to send them for more comprehensive tests for conclusive evidence at the Regional Analytical Laboratory at Kakkanad,” said Sakkeer Hussain A, a food safety officer attached to Thrikkakara circle.

Usually, it takes a fortnight for the lab to come up with reports in such cases. However, in view of the seriousness of the issue, the Food Safety Department has asked the lab to submit the result in a week.

If the samples’ test are positive, the department will collect four statutory samples from the same market and register a case before a first-class judicial magistrate court under Section 50 of the Food Safety and Standards Act. As per the Act, in the event of chemical presence in a food item, it will be classified as “unsafe” and will entail both imprisonment for terms varying between six months and three years and fine ranging from ₹1 lakh to ₹10 lakh.

Presence of formalin is suspected in the lone sample collected from the household at Thrikkakara as well and it will also be tested at the Regional Analytical Lab.

Sanil P. George, a doctor, had bought fish from Vazhakkala market on Sunday. “It gave such an unpleasant and nauseous feeling that we were sure that something was amiss straight away. This is a crime against society and people should stop consuming fish altogether if they get such poisonous stuff despite paying their hard earned money,” Mr. George said.

Awareness campaign

Meanwhile, the Food Safety Department will continue its drive against the sale of adulterated fish in more markets in the district in the coming days. “We are now creating an awareness campaign against the malpractice so that those who who are guilty discontinue it before being prosecuted. Plans are also afoot to make available the kit developed by CIFT at a very cheap rate so that people can themselves carry out an initial check on their own,” Mr. Hussain said.

The kit developed to detect the presence of ammonia and formalin in fish comes with a colour-changing strip and two reagents for both chemicals. The strip rubbed against the fish sample will change colour when the reagents are dropped if the sample has traces of those chemicals.