

Soon, affordable kit to swiftly detect formalin in fish

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PANAJI: A rapid detection kit, which has been newly developed by ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) in Cochin, Kerala for checking adulterants in fresh fish could prove to be an important tool to detect fish preservatives.

The kit is said to be affordable and user-friendly despite being developed with advanced technology. Once made available in the market for commercial use, it will help Goans expose the bad practices of fish traders, who use harmful chemicals like ammonia or formalin for preservation of fish.

“The kit contains a paper strip and it has a chemical solution, which is a user-friendly technology. Just one paper strip needs to be taken and swabbed onto a fish in different areas at least three-four times. When brought in contact with fish, the strip will change its colour if formalin or any other chemical is present,” said director of CIFT Dr C N Ravishankar while speaking to ‘The Navhind Times’ over the phone.

He said that the entire process of the test will take only two minutes, adding that the kit will soon be made available across the country. “Any government, private laboratory or common man can afford this kit. The paper strips will be priced around Rs 3 each and a kit will have 50 strips,” he said.

Dr Ravishankar said that there is formalin present naturally in a few species of marine fish. However, studies have not found any chemical in freshwater fish. He said the natural presence of formalin is mostly found in species of fish like Bombay duck. He said that the kit is developed in such a way that it can only detect the added formalin and not the natural formalin which is inherently present in some species.

“We have done an extensive survey of fishing and it is nowhere that the naturally occurring formalin will be more than 2 ppm (parts per million). Our kit will detect the formalin present at 4 ppm and above and if it is less than that, then it is safe for human consumption,” he said. Dr Ravishankar said that a chart is also provided with the kit which will identify the nature of the chemical used as preservative for the fish.

He said that there are chances that formalin from fish samples may evaporate and it could be one of the major reasons why the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) agency of different states may have failed to detect the deadly chemical in fish.

He said that international and national government agencies have prohibited any form of preservatives for fish and issued strict guidelines according to which fresh fish or shellfish should be preserved only by means of ice.

Dr Ravishankar said that the government has outsourced the manufacturing of the rapid detection kit to a particular company for bulk production and for the time being, one of the samples of the kit has been provided by the CIFT to FDA in Goa free of cost