

FSSAI allows hotels to replace plastic drinking water bottles with glass bottles

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The food and consumer affairs ministry has also asked the packaged-water industry to come up with suggestions for alternatives to plastic bottles.(HT image)

In a move aimed at reducing plastic waste, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), has said hotels can replace plastic bottles with paper-sealed glass bottles for in-house guests as long as water safety standards are met and the bottles are not sold, according to a circular issued by the food regulator.

The circular dated September 9, a copy of which has been seen by HT, was issued following a representation made by the hotels to the FSSAI a few weeks ago seeking permission to serve water in glass bottles to in-house guests.

“The Taj group of hotels approached us asking if they could serve their guests glass bottled water from their own plants instead of packaged plastic drinking water bottles. We

accepted the request for consideration and asked our committee that already deals with issues related to plastics to look into it. The committee gave the go-ahead,” said Pawan Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI.

The experts dealing with plastic-related issues in FSSAI examined the feasibility of the move, and gave the nod.

“...At present hotels across the country serve packaged drinking water in plastic bottles. The overall consumption of plastic bottles used in hotels results in considerable plastic wastage. Taking cognisance of this, it has been decided to allow to serve drinking water in paper sealed reusable glass bottles for captive use within the hotel premises...” the FSSAI circular reads.

Agarwal says, “In the larger interest of the safety of our environment, we have allowed it not just for the Taj group of hotels [but also] other five or four-star hotels also who are willing, and prepared, to start making the transition. It’s just the beginning; gradually the practice would need to be followed by the entire industry including the caterers,” he added.

A Taj spokesperson confirmed they had approached FSSAI.

“The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) in its endeavour to address the growing plastic menace, pledged on the occasion of Earth Hour 2018 to phase out single-use plastics from all its hotels so as to play a significant role towards protecting the environment...,” the spokesperson said in a statement.

“Sometime early this year we undertook to phasing out single use plastic in our rooms across the group. First phase of which included some of our hotels participating in a plastic elimination challenge — to give up plastic usage through innovative solutions. Many of our hotels have reduced usage of plastic by replacing wrapped dry amenities in rooms, such as toothbrush, shaving kit etc. with eco-friendly substitutes.”

According to the circular, the hotels will need to set-up in-house drinking water bottling systems on their premises, and follow the sanitation and hygiene practices; the water served shall conform to BIS specifications for drinking water, and the bottles must not be for sale and served free to guests.

“Our inspectors will keep checking the bottling system to see if the water being served is safe to drink,” said Agarwal.

The food and consumer affairs ministry has also asked the packaged-water industry to come up with suggestions for alternatives to plastic bottles.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Monday reiterated India’s resolve to tackle the problem of plastic waste at the 14th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) at Greater Noida.