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78% of consumers unaware of how to identify artificially ripened mangoes: Survey

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Chennai: Consumer awareness on adulteration in mangoes is low, according to a study released by private survey group on Wednesday. Of the 13,000 people surveyed, around 78% said they don't know how to identify artificially ripened mangoes.

This information comes against the backdrop of intensified search and raid operations by the state food safety and drug administration department in fruit shops in and around Chennai.

As far as the city is concerned, there are 120 shops in Koyambedu market which sell mangoes. Apart from this, around 70 private retail stores sell mangoes on a prominent scale on a regular basis. Ahead of this year's mango season, authorities had conducted three meetings with these shop owners, conducted demonstrations on what to and what not to do for improving ripening of fruits.

At the end of these sessions, notices were issued explaining the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and consequences they'll face for violating it. "This is to ensure that the shopkeepers don't claim acquittal on humanitarian basis as was done in the past. So far, we have booked cases against four shops -- three in Koyambedu and one in T Nagar -- under Sections 50 and 55 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006," said A Ramakrishnan, designated food safety officer of Chennai district.

The District Revenue Officer is the aggregation officer, who will hear these cases, and impose fine of up to Rs 4 lakh on each of the violators, he added. "Besides, 8-10% of direct fruit usage will be scanned on a daily basis."

All four shops were caught red-handed for using ethylene sachets in direct contact with the mangoes.

The private study, however, pointed out that popular online food shopping apps sell mangoes that are ripened using ethylene claiming that ethylene ripening is permitted by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

Rejecting this, TN food safety department authorities said direct contact of ethylene sachets is barred as per the SOP released by FSSAI last December.

Rather, fruit shops are allowed to undertake ethylene ripening only at the rate of one sachet per 10 kg of mangoes. The sachet should be soaked in water and kept inside a small perforated plastic box (one cm area). This box can be placed in an air-tight box containing mangoes and should be removed after 24 hours.

One notable thing this mango season is that no calcium carbide stones were used for artificial ripening processes. These stones cause cancer and neurological problems.