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FSSAI to collect used cooking oil

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Madurai: Food safety officials will launch Repurpose Used Cooking Oil (RUCO), an ambitious programme by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to manage used cooking oil in an environment-friendly way. The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that cooking oils used by bulk users such as hotels, snacks manufacturers and bakeries do not enter into the system again. Often, used cooking oil is sold at cheaper rate to small eateries or disposed of in an environmentally hazardous manner.

FSSAI has made notifications in Food Safety and Standards (licensing and registration of food businesses), First Amendment Regulation, 2017 in this regard. The regulations prescribe the limit for the Total Polar Compounds (TPC) to be a maximum of 25%, beyond which cooking oil is not suitable for use. TPC is the widely accepted parameter to determine the quality of cooking oil. TPC level increases rapidly when oil is reused more than three times. Prolonged consumption of food prepared in reused oil can cause serious health problems including hypertension, liver diseases, increased cholesterol level and even cancer, according to food safety officials.

Designated officer for food safety, Madurai district, Dr M Somasundaram told TOI that they will launch the programme in a few days at a private city college so as to drive the message to a large number of houses. "We have identified five big players involved in oil trade in Madurai and from them a list of bulk purchasers, who buy 50 litres of oil a day, has been obtained. Oil will be collected from them to make biodiesel out of it," he said.

For every 50 litres of oils used, there has to be waste oil of 10 litres. The waste oil will be sent to a private company with which FSSAI has forged a tie up. An estimated 4 lakh litres of cooking oils are distributed from Madurai to various southern districts. The oils are brought in container trucks and packed here, another official from food safety department said. Dr Somasundaram said that a sticker will be pasted in hotels, where waste oil is being collected by the food safety department. Customers can rest assured on the safety of the food in hotels with such stickers. "We have found that some bulk cooking oil users had been selling

waste oil at cheaper rate in the market. However, we are yet to find out where the waste oil is being utilized,” he said.

An insider from oil manufacturers association said that the oil lands up in roadside chicken and snacks shops. Not all roadside shops are at fault, but those which sell snacks at a cheaper rate are doing it to cut costs. Although a major proportion of oil reaching Madurai is palm oil, only a fraction of it is being sold under that name. The rest is sold as various other cooking oils like ground nut oil, gingelly oil and sunflower oil by mixing essence. According to the insider, this was how traders are keeping the oil prices low. “For instance, it will cost Rs 230 a litre to manufacture groundnut oil, but the oil is available in market starting from Rs 120,” he added.