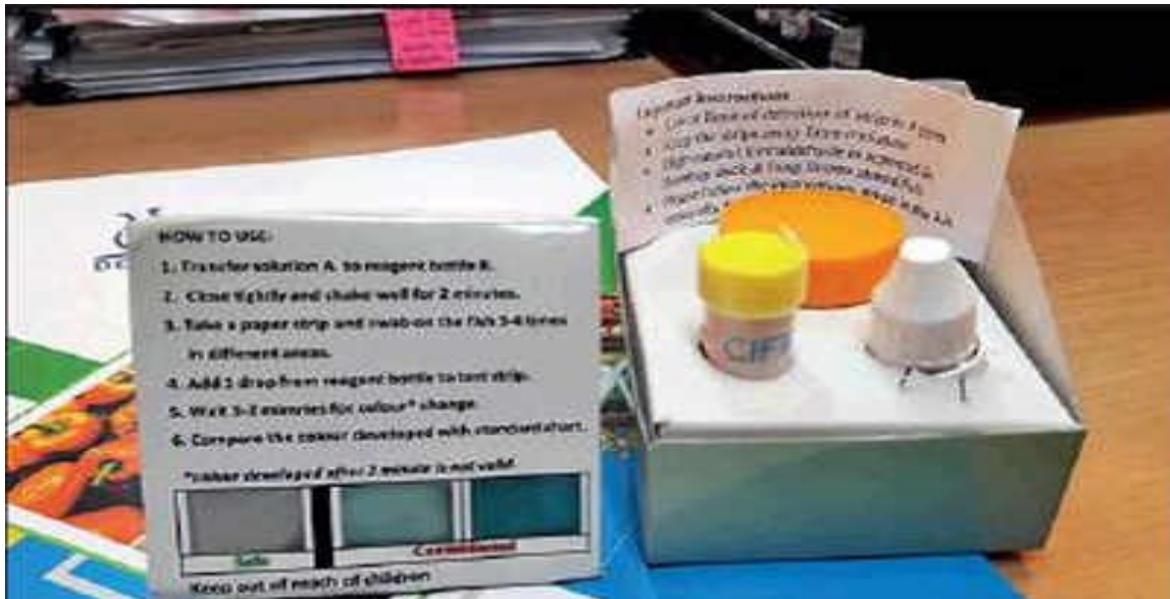


THE TIMES OF INDIA

Delhi government looking at Rs 3.5 test to detect trouble

TNN | Jul 22, 2018, 12.01 AM IST



NEW DELHI: The word formalin is suddenly being bandied about after some states banned the sale of fish for showing traces of the organic compound. Delhi, which gets almost all its fish supplies from outside the state, however, is yet to take any action to check if the fish in the capital is contaminated. Fish often reach Delhi after a week or more of their catching. Formalin can be used to arrest decomposition, but its use in fish to keep it fresh is dangerous because the compound is carcinogenic.

The scare about formalin-laced fish has adversely affected sales in Goa, West Bengal, Kerala, Nagaland and Assam. In Delhi, however, tests are yet to be carried out to check if the supplies coming from states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Kerala are free of the contaminant.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), in collaboration with the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), has developed a test kit called CIFTtest that can be used to determine the presence of formalin on fish. While FSSAI is distributing limited free samples

to food safety departments of different states, an official of the authority said Delhi government “hasn’t asked for sample kits yet”.

A government spokesperson assured that the food safety department “is looking into it”, but did not specify if any tests have been carried out on the fish reaching the main wholesale markets, especially at Ghazipur.

“Formalin is used to ensure fish remain ‘visibly’ fresh when in actual fact it may be stale,” the government official said. “The substance usually doesn’t penetrate beyond the scales of fish.” However, it requires robust and proper washing under running tap water to remove formalin — and even that is not a surety for safety.

The sample test kits being distributed to state governments are easy-to-use kits and there is a probability that they will soon be commercially available for use by households. The test kit comprises paper strips and a reagent. A fish is swabbed with a strip and then subjected to the reagent. If the strip changes colour, contamination is confirmed. Each kit has 40 strips and each test costs Rs 3.50, the official said.