
Targeted Food Surveillance - Formaldehyde in Noodlefish

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

August 2011

Background

- Formaldehyde is present in many animal and plant species as a product of their normal metabolism. It can be found naturally in food including fruits, vegetables, meats, marine fish and crustacean. However, there is no report that it is naturally present in noodlefish. Study conducted by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) suggested that formaldehyde found in noodlefish was a result of abuse.
- The CFS has repeatedly detected noodlefish samples containing formaldehyde in recent years. The CFS believes that formaldehyde might have been added to the noodlefish as a preservative after it was caught, or during transportation or storage.
- As such, the CFS has conducted a targeted surveillance on formaldehyde in noodlefish regularly since 2007 to assess the situation.

Samples tested and overall results

- The CFS collected 9 noodlefish samples for testing of formaldehyde.
- All the samples were satisfactory.

Advice for the trade

- Under existing legislation, formaldehyde is not permitted for use as a food preservative. Contravention of the law could lead to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and 6 months' imprisonment
- Carefully check the origins of food products, and only obtain them from reliable sources.
- Do not add formaldehyde in food.
- Maintain a proper cold chain to ensure that fish and fish products are kept safely throughout processes including storage, transportation and display for sale.

Advice for consumers

- The main health concern of formaldehyde is its cancer causing potential risk through exposure via inhalation. According to the World Health Organization, there is no sufficient evidence showing that formaldehyde is carcinogenic through exposure from oral route.
- Patronize reliable food premises and food retailers.
- Choose only fish that are fresh and avoid those with unusual smell and noodlefish that are stiff.
- Wash noodlefish thoroughly before cooking as formaldehyde is water-soluble.
- Take a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive intake of food chemicals from a small range of food items.