

Targeted Food Surveillance - Formaldehyde in Noodlefish

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

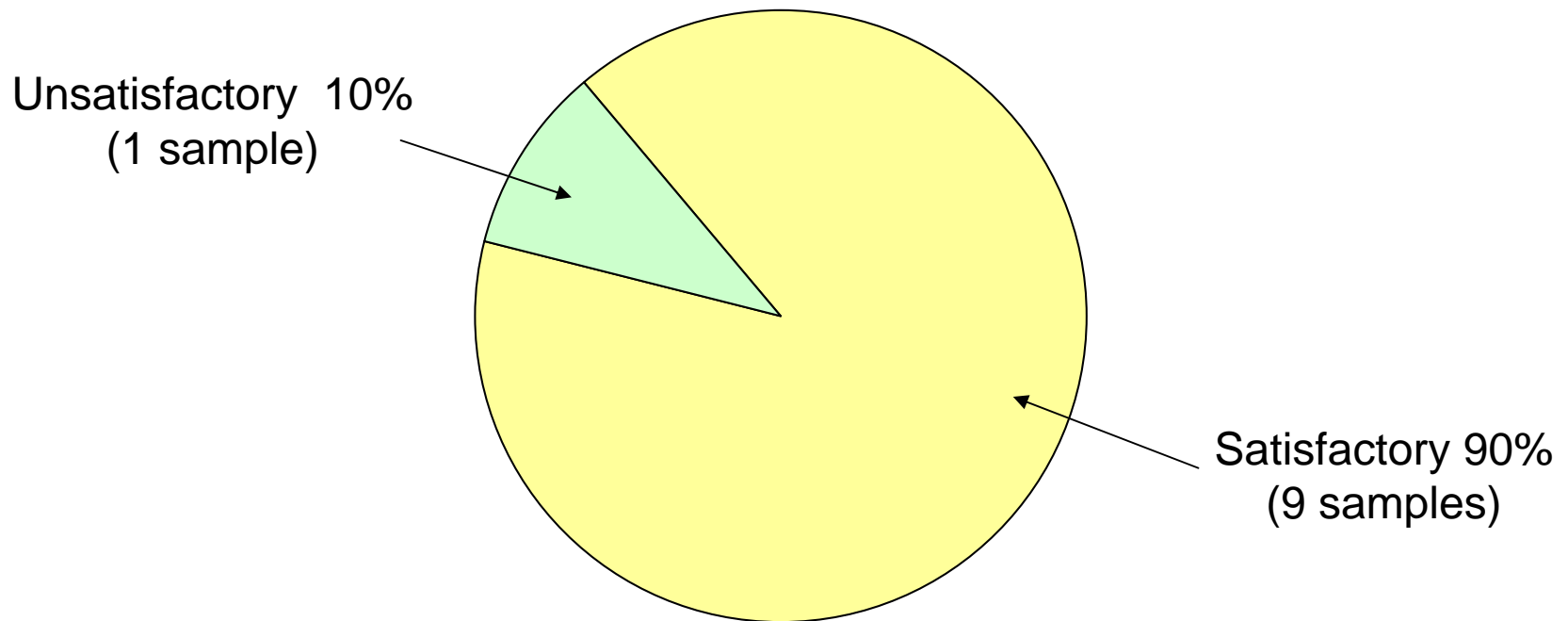
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Background

- Objective:
 - To assess the situation of formaldehyde in noodlefish
- Sampling:
 - 10 samples were collected for testing of formaldehyde

Overall results

- Overall satisfactory rate was 90%.
- 1 unsatisfactory sample was found to contain formaldehyde at 1200 ppm.



Unsatisfactory sample

- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) believes that formaldehyde might have been added to the noodlefish as a preservative after it was caught, or during transportation or storage.
- At the level of formaldehyde detected in the noodlefish sample, health effects such as abdominal pain and vomiting, and kidney problems cannot be ruled out for high consumers.
- Consumption of noodlefish by the general public with the same detected level as this sample on a long-term basis might have effects on the gastrointestinal tract. While there is inadequate human data on the chronic health effects of formaldehyde through food consumption, the effects are extrapolated from animal experiments.
- The main health concern of formaldehyde is its cancer causing potential through exposure via inhalation. According to World Health Organization, there is no sufficient evidence showing that formaldehyde is carcinogenic through exposure from oral route.

Follow up actions

- Issue warning letter to the stall operator concerned
- If sale of noodlefish is detected at the stall concerned, the CFS will take follow up sample.
- Trace the source of fish in question.
- Take prosecution action if there is sufficient evidence.

Advice for 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 six months' imprisonment.
- Be cautious about the origins from which food products are sourced, and should 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

- Patronize reliable food premises and food retailers
- Choose only fish that are fresh and avoid those with unusual smell; and avoid buying noodlefish that are stiff (formaldehyde could stiffen flesh of fish).
- Wash and cook food products thoroughly as formaldehyde is water soluble and could dissipate upon heating.
- Take a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive intake of food chemicals from a small range of food items.