

Targeted Food Surveillance - Formaldehyde in Noodlefish

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

November 2008

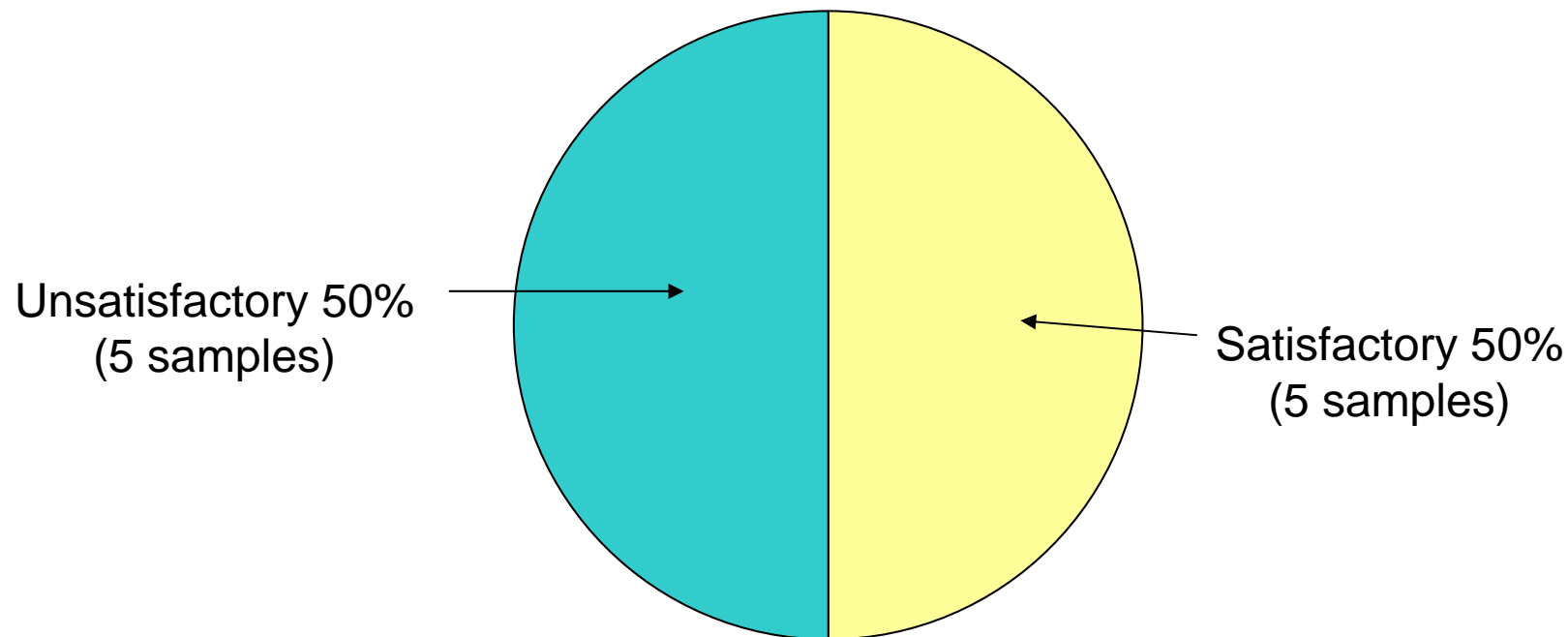


Background

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

Overall results

- Overall satisfactory rate was 50%.
- Totally 5 unsatisfactory samples were found to contain formaldehyde ranging from 170 to 570 ppm.



Unsatisfactory samples

- It was believed that the formaldehyde was added as a preservative after the fish were caught, or during transportation or storage.
- At the levels of formaldehyde detected in the noodlefish samples, it is unlikely to cause adverse health effect upon normal consumption, but for the sample with highest detected level of formaldehyde, consumption on a long-term basis for high consumers could result in increased health risk, such as gastro-intestinal upset. While there is inadequate human data on the chronic health effects of formaldehyde through food consumption, the effects are extrapolated from animal experiments.

Follow up actions

- Issuing warning letters to the shop and stall operators concerned asking them to stop selling the affected products.
- Tracing the source of fish in question.

Advice for trade

- Not to add formaldehyde into fish or other marine products.
- 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.

Advice for consumers

- When buying or cooking marine products (e.g., noodlefish):
 - ❑ patronise reliable shops;
 - ❑ choose only fish that are fresh and avoid those with unusual smell;
 - ❑ avoid buying noodlefish that are stiff (formaldehyde could stiffen flesh of fish); and
 - ❑ wash and cook marine products thoroughly as formaldehyde is water soluble and could dissipate upon heating.