



A fishy matter: on the formaldehyde contamination of fish

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Concerns over formaldehyde contamination of fish need to be addressed — scientifically

Highlights

- Reports of traces of the chemical formaldehyde in fish in several States highlight both the uncertainties of science, and the importance of clear risk-communication. In June, the Kerala government found formaldehyde-laced fish being transported into the State
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has banned formaldehyde in fresh fish, while the International Agency for Research on Cancer labelled the chemical a carcinogen in 2004

Why is formaldehyde in fish a problem?

- For one thing, fresh fish should not have preservatives, and the presence of formaldehyde points to unscrupulous vendors trying to pass off stale catch as recent.
- Two, the lack of evidence linking ingested formaldehyde with cancer doesn't necessarily make the chemical safe. At high doses, it causes gastric irritation.
- Three, distinguishing natural from added: When certain marine fish are improperly frozen during transit, formaldehyde forms in them naturally. But this formaldehyde binds to the tissue, unlike added formaldehyde, which remains free.

Source: [The hindu](#)

