

Business Standard

Dated: 29-05-2016

Page No: 1&3

FSSAI defends bromate proposal in packaged water

Regulator claims new standard for potential cancer-causing contaminant at 10 micrograms per litre in line with best practices



Now, get ready to pay more for colas, bottled water, mobiles FSSAI proposes to allow bromates in drinking water Bread additive stir: The circus around potassium bromate On World Water Day, worst water crisis in a decade

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on Saturday said the proposed new standard for the potential cancer-causing contaminant “bromate” at 10 micrograms per litre in packaged drinking water is in line with best international practices.

In a written statement, FSSAI, referring to its proposal, said, “This is a draft standard and would be finalised after getting inputs from the stakeholders. The process for setting the standards for food articles is a continuous evolving process.”

Business Standard on Friday had reported that FSSAI in January had proposed to permit 10 micrograms per litre of bromate in bottled water .Currently, bromate is not allowed in bottled water in India. The proposal was put in public domain for 30 days for feedback. Since then, the food regulator has not passed the final order though the period for receiving comments is over.

In January 2015, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre scientists published research showing high levels of bromate in 27 per cent of the bottled water samples they had picked up. The **study** read, “Bromate levels varied from below detection limits to 43 microgram per litre with an average of 10.7 microgram per litre. At that juncture, bromide presence was not allowed at all in bottled water.”

FSSAI said in its statement, “Current standards of water being developed by FSSAI recognise that this contaminant may be found in water in some cases and prescribes a limit for bromate in water. While India’s ground realities have to be kept in mind, FSSAI is committed to continuously improving and aligning the national food standards with global standards.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that the toxic contaminant should ideally not be present at all in drinking water. But, based on the limited capability in 2005 of detecting the contaminant in labs prescribed then, countries such as the US and the European Union (EU) set the bromate standard at 10 micrograms per litre — the level at which it could be then detected in lab samples. In 2014, the US approved testing methods that can now confirm presence of bromates even at the limit of 0.02 microgram per litre and alternatives to using ozone for disinfecting water. The standards of these countries have not been revised since. The FSSAI in its statement referred to the standards of EU and the US at 10 microgram per litre and Australia at 20 microgram per litre, while stating it had now proposed comparable standards for bromate in packaged water.

FSSAI said, as the story had noted, that bromate contamination can occur during the use of ozone and hypochlorite solutions to disinfect water that is to be packaged. Some bottlers of water world over do use alternative methods which do not require ozone that leads to bromate formation, notes the International Bottled Water Association in its briefing note on bromate. Ozonation, a cheaper disinfectant method, has been traditionally used for large-scale disinfestations in municipal water supply across EU and the US.

Before the release of the statement by FSSAI, its Chief Executive Officer Pavan Kumar Agarwal had told Business Standard on Saturday: “FSSAI is currently updating the list of additives, the draft for which was recently put in public domain. Once this exercise of setting the standards for nearly 11,000 additives is complete, all such issues that arise out of anomalies in vertical standards, such as that of packaged water, shall be automatically taken care of. This is because the master list of additives being finalised shall overrule all existing vertical standards of additives and contaminants.”

FSSAI IN NEWS

The press release from FSSAI later pointed out that bromate is an additive for bread but a contaminant in bottled water. The list of additives with their maximum use levels, being finalised by FSSAI, does not deal with the contaminants.
