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Food regulator wants excise inspectors to check food quality too



Traces of harmful chemicals indicate rampant adulteration of milk. Thinkstock

With an aim to reduce inspector raj, excise inspectors will soon hold dual charge of both: excise and food inspection.

In a first of its kind decision, the regulator, FSSAI, has asked state chief secretaries to empower excise commissioners to also hold powers of food inspectors. Initially the move will apply to ‘alcoholic drinks’, in which cases of adulteration and spurious liquor have swelled.

Pawan Agarwal, CEO of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, on April 8 wrote to states to delegate powers of a food safety officer to excise

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commissioners 'at their option', reducing the number of inspection trips by officials.

Confirming the development, Agarwal told HT, "This is not only going to reduce inspector raj at the ground level but will also help us keep a close watch on retail outlets."

The step will also bring synergies in the functioning of both departments and avoid duplication of work, he said. "The notification of excise inspectors as food safety officers would be contingent on their possessing the educational qualifications," Agarwal's letter said. "They would continue to work as excise inspectors for their work to implement the excise policy and be responsible to the office of excise commissioner of state.

Welcoming the move, Deepak Roy, chairman, Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies, said, "This is a welcome move. We will now have to deal with only one group of officials, which is always better."

A food safety officer inspects licensed units frequently to verify that licence conditions are being complied with, and to procure samples to be sent for analysis. An excise inspector keeps a check on the stocks maintained by the seller/shopkeeper and whether they are paying due taxes.

According to NSSO's 2011-12 consumption data, the average urban Indian, meanwhile, drinks 96 ml per week or 5 litres in a year, country liquor being most popular.
