Canadian Food Inspection Agency | Agence canadienne d'inspection des aliments

Communique

June 17, 1999

TO: ALL IMPORTERS OF FISH

SUBJECT: FISH TREATED WITH CARBON MONOXIDE

Imported fish, especially tuna, are sometimes treated with carbon monoxide (CO). This process is termed "tasteless smoke" because in many cases CO used in the process is generated from natural smoke. The CO-treated fish appear unnaturally bright, with watermelon-like colour. This colour may give a false impression about the freshness of the fish, and it may mask colour changes caused by decomposition.

Only additives listed in Division 16, and prescribed for fish in Division 21, of the Food and Drug Regulations can be applied. There is no provision for the use of CO alone on any food products in Canada, therefore, this practice is illegal and the product is adulterated/unwholesome. While CO is a component of smoke and it is permitted in smoked fish, it cannot be used as the sole additive.

Please be informed that no shipments of fish treated with CO will be allowed entry into Canada. The fish will be rejected for non-permitted additive (CO). The primary methodology used will be sensory evaluation (unnatural colour). If the product is rejected the processor will be placed on the Import Alert List. Legal action may also be considered in cases where the importer knowingly marketed the adulterated/unwholesome fish.

Thank you for your cooperation on this issue.

Cameron Prince
Director
Fish, Seafood and Production Division

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