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Corporation complaint cell abuzz with regular calls

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CHENNAI: If you find an insect in the mayonnaise or if you feel uneasy about the colour used in a particular food product in a restaurant, you could call 1913 and complain. The complaint cell number of the Chennai Corporation receives regular calls regarding adulterated food or food that is prepared or served in unhygienic conditions.

According to rough estimates, the civic body's food inspectors and sanitary inspectors conduct about 100 raids at hotels, drinking water manufacturers and retailers, road side eateries, fruit and vegetable stalls.

"Our most recent drive was against mangoes artificially ripened using calcium carbide stones. We raided, seized and destroyed 80 tonnes of mangoes. Godowns of wholesalers were also sealed. Though apples were also raided when we tested the wax in the laboratory, we found that it was not of a prohibited kind," said P. Kuganantham, Health Officer, Chennai Corporation. He said that in the past few months due to stringent measures, over 10 lakh drinking water packets that did not meet the mandatory requirements such as printing of manufacturing date, address of the manufacturer, batch number and expiry date were destroyed. The Chennai Corporation's 10 assistant health officers (one for each zone) are independent local health authorities under whom there are 20 food inspectors and 155 sanitary inspectors.

This network of officials takes informal food samples. If found adulterated, that particular food stuff is lifted as formal sample. If the stuff is found adulterated, action will be taken under the Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) Act, 1954, against the manufacturers and retail sellers.

The civic body takes action against a large number of pavement sellers on a regular basis for

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selling food that is contaminated and could cause disease. However, most of these sellers come back to their old spots after a few days of the raid, the spot in front of the Government General Hospital being an example of this. Dr. Kuganantham said the staff strength was not enough for such a large city. "We still have a long way to go in implementation of the PFA Act. We do need more staff."