License must for eateries: Regulator

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New Delhi: The central food safety regulator on Tuesday warned that hotels and restaurants operating without its license will be sealed and closed if they fail to take its permit within the next three months. The rule applies to all establishments, including religious places where food is free. However, petty manufacturers, retailers and hawkers, among others, are exempt.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) CEO Pawan Kumar Agarwal said he would first ask states to run a special drive to create awareness about the compulsory licenses.

"I am told that 30-40 per cent of our restaurants and hotels do not have FSSAI licenses. If this is the law of the land, is it acceptable?" Agarwal said at Foodzania 2017, a conference on food service retail organised by trade body FICCI here.

Agarwal conceded some confusion in businesses on whether the FSSAI license is mandatory and said the states' drive aimed to clear such doubts. "After the time period for that (the awareness drive) is over, we are advising them (state officials) to seal and close all units if they fail to take FSSAI licenses."

The watchdog has been in place for the last six years and by now, all hotels and restaurants should have secured the license, Agarwal pointed out and stressed there would be "no comprise". Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, no entity - profit or non-profit, public or private - shall be allowed to run any food business except under a license. Agarwal said once the licenses were issued, food businesses needed to comply with all FSSAI norms, such as those on food safety. The regulator will soon make it mandatory for all food businesses to have at least one person in each outlet designated as food safety supervisor who must be trained and certified under its curriculum.

The FSSAI license must be displayed at prominent points in food outlets and restaurants, with contact details of customer care as well as the area food inspector, Agarwal said. The regulator is working on ratings for cleanliness, such as "hygiene and hygiene plus", and these would be issued soon.