

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: Care of shellfish at retail
	4	Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: FH30
Review: 27/12/2007		Health & Safety	
		Public Health	
STATUS: TRADE ADVICE		Pollution Control	
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	

Information Sheet FH30

Care of Live Shellfish in Shops and Caterers

Live shellfish are just that - alive. Their value and safety comes from them staying alive. If they die before you sell or cook them then your business is wasting money and putting consumers at risk.

If you sell or cook with live shellfish, you need to know how to look after them. This will make sure they do not die before you need them and to make sure that they will be safe.

Where to get them

1. Always buy your live shellfish from a reputable supplier. If you are not buying direct from a processor, then you should make sure that you know exactly who processed them in the first place. This information will come on a waterproof label, usually inside or attached to the bag. This label will have on it:
 - The identification mark of the business, which packed the shellfish. This will usually be of the form UK ZZ999 EEC. 'ZZ' can be *any* two letters (signifying the local authority for the area in which they were packed and '999' can be any number between 001 and 999, the number of the packing plant.
 - The species of live bivalve mollusc (common name and scientific name)
 - The date of packaging with at least the day and month, but not necessarily the year
 - Either a date of minimum durability or the words, 'these animals must be alive when sold'
2. Live bivalve molluscs (ones with two shells) are always at risk of having high levels of toxin (poison) in them, particularly in the late autumn, winter and early spring. Sometimes, the Food Standards Agency will ban shellfish gathering from certain areas because toxins levels in shellfish are too high. Details of these banned areas can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/shellfish/algaltoxin/>. This will mean that it is sometimes not possible for producers to provide what you want. For example, it is sometimes only possible to get shucked king scallops, where the packers have removed the most potentially harmful parts.
3. Remember that the condition and availability of live shellfish will vary with the season, so expect prices to vary. Be wary of anyone offering shellfish significantly cheaper than your normal supplier.

Handling

4. Handle live shellfish gently. Your supplier should do this too. If you get shellfish with broken shells, you cannot use them. Even if shells have not been broken, research has shown that the life of shellfish is a lot shorter if they have been roughly handled.
5. Make sure that oysters are always stored concave shell downwards. This is the shell which is the more flat of the two

Storage

6. Shellfish must always be kept chilled. If you do not keep them chilled, they will die much more quickly. However, different types have different ideal temperatures. These temperatures reflect the type of water the shellfish originally came from. More information can be obtained from <http://www.seafish.co.uk/>
7. Live shellfish must not be put in water or sprayed with water. This is because they need seawater with the right amount of salt in it. Water with no salt or the wrong amount of salt will kill them.
8. Ice made from clean tap water can be used to help keep shellfish chilled, but make sure that the water from the ice can drain away. Shellfish lying in melted ice made from tap water will die.

Cooking / sale

9. Shellfish must be live when you sell them or begin to cook with them. If you gently tap them, they will respond by closing up. If they don't close up, then they are probably dead.
10. If bivalves (ones with two shells) don't open up during cooking, they were probably dead to start with. They must be discarded.

Record keeping

11. After splitting up the contents of any package of live bivalve molluscs, the label described at point 1, above, must be kept for 60 days.

More Information

12. Good information on live shellfish handling is available as a '.pdf' file at http://www.seafish.org/pdf.pl?file=seafish/Documents/guideline_bivalve_molluscs_facilities.pdf.

If you are in any doubt about what to do, then please contact us on 01506 282500 or environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk.