

# Seafood: Ripped Off by Ice?

Investigators Say Some Seafood Companies Count Ice When Weighing and Pricing Items

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Seafood is supposed to help your heart, but in some cases it may be unfairly hurting your pocketbook.

**Investigators** in 17 states have uncovered fish fraud, where consumers are not just paying for the fish they are buying, but also for the ice coating that surrounds that fish.

"Any fraud is absolutely outrageous," said National Fisheries Institute President John Connelly in an interview with **ABC News**. "It's absolutely outrageous."

Fresh seafood is allowed to be coated with an ice glaze to preserve the quality and taste of the fish, but consumers are supposed to pay for the weight of the fish alone. Investigators found, during their investigation, that is not always the case. Some companies are weighing the fish with the ice coating, and even packing on extra ice to add more weight.

"Over 21,000 consumer packages of seafood were removed from sale nationally during the four-week investigation," Judy Cardin, weights and measures chief for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, told reporters. "In Wisconsin, inspectors in some cases found ice comprising over 40 percent of the product weight, which meant an overcharge of over \$6.00 per package. Wisconsin inspectors removed 546 packages of seafood from sale at 53 locations during the investigation."

Rooting out the fraud completely could prove difficult.

"Unfortunately, we're not quite sure where the fraud occurs. From boat to plate there are opportunities for fraud. The fisherman, the processor, even the retailer will sometimes buy a product that he knows is too good or she knows is too good," Connelly told ABC News.

Consumers are left holding the bag. "I mean, I trust them if they say it's a pound," said one shopper, Robert Kelly.

In one case, investigators found that ice accounted for as much as 40 percent of the total weight being charged. Ultimately, the consumer ended up paying nearly \$26 for about \$16 worth of shrimp.

"I would definitely like to get the full weight of what I'm paying for," said one shopper, Lily Hollenan.

Aida Croal had similar feelings: "They need to fix it ... it's fraud if that's really true."

## Protect Yourself

There is a way to tell if you're getting a fair deal on a bag at the grocery. If a bag really contains a pound of seafood, then it should weigh about 10 percent more than that to account for the ice.

"The most important thing a consumer can do is buy from a reputable grocery store and buy from a reputable restaurant chain and make sure those companies are buying from good vendors that adhere to things like the **Better Seafood Board**," said Connelly.

Mis-weighing any food is against the law, and the seafood industry says it wants the FDA and state governments to crack down. "This is a case of the industry actually coming to the government and asking them to enforce the law," said Connelly.