

FRESH FISH

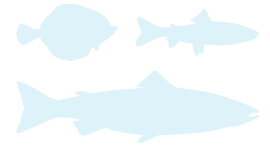


In general, all animal products – meat, poultry, eggs, etc. – donated to an Emergency Food Organization (EFO) must meet the same standards as animal products sold in a retail store. There are a few exceptions to this rule for some lower risk foods. Both donors and EFOs should take steps to make sure donated food is safe for clients. This guide addresses fresh fish donations.

Fishing in Washington is highly regulated. Commercial and recreational licenses from the WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) specify the types and size of fish. Location is also listed in WDFW licenses. EFOs may not accept “bycatch” as a donation. Bycatch refers to fish caught by a licensed fisher that does not meet the specifications of their license (ex. wrong size or type of fish).

On rare occasions, WDFW may donate bycatch confiscated from a fisher or processor. WDFW will provide an authorization letter and instructions for safely transporting the fish. WDFW may also donate surplus adult fish from state hatcheries.

FRESH FISH Donations Guide



Source

WDFW hatcheries, retail businesses, and those with valid commercial or recreational fishing licenses from WDFW may donate whole or minimally-processed fish.

Minimally processed means the fish heads and/or viscera (guts) are removed. Donated fish must be kept at an internal temperature of 40°F or below during storage and transport to prevent contamination and spoilage.

Fish may also come as fish in the round, meaning that the fish come whole without processing. This may be how some WDFW hatchery donations arrive. Fish in the round must still be kept at 40°F or below and should be kept on ice or in a cooler. They will need to be distributed within a few hours of receiving.

Minimal Processing

Gutting fish received from WDFW hatchery donations is allowed at the food pantry-level as long as proper hand-washing and cross contamination prevention steps are followed. Discuss this process with your local health jurisdiction first.

At all stages of processing and transport, fish not acquired from a retail establishment must be accompanied by a statement identifying the name and address of the person who harvested the fish; the license, permit or tag number; the number and kind of fish provided; the date caught; the area where it was caught; and the fisher’s signature.

Visual Inspection

Donated fish requires emphasis on visual inspection cues.



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**FOOD
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An EFO possessing a game fish not acquired from a retail establishment must have a signed, written statement identifying the person who caught the fish; the license, permit or tag number; and other details to confirm that the fish was caught legally.

Find your local health jurisdiction at doh.wa.gov/about-us/washingtons-public-health-system/washington-state-local-health-jurisdictions.

EFO: Emergency Food Organization (food banks, food pantries, meal programs)

WDFW: WA Department of Fish and Wildlife

WSDA: WA Department of Agriculture

Jurisdiction: Local or county health department or district

RCW: Revised Code of Washington



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**Food Safety and
Consumer Services Division**

Food Assistance

foodassistance@agr.wa.gov

agr.wa.gov/services/food-access

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Please call the WSDA Receptionist at 360-902-1976 or TTY 800-833-6388.

- The eyes of the fish should be clear, plump, wet and shiny.
- The tail and dorsal fins should be healthy-looking, wet and intact.
- The fish should feel cold, wet and slippery, but not sticky.
- When pressed, the flesh should spring back.
- The gills should be bright red. The gills should also feel clean and cold, not slimy.

Transportation/Storage

Use temperature control when transporting fish. Fresh fish should be kept at 4 0°F or below, and frozen fish must be kept frozen at all times. Thermometers should be used throughout all points of storage and transport for any meat and/or egg product.

Private Citizen Donations

EFOs may accept fish donated from private citizens as long as the fish was caught by someone holding a valid commercial or recreational license from WDFW. The fish must also be accompanied by a written statement (see Minimal Processing section). Donors should verify that appropriate temperature was maintained throughout processing, storage, and transport to the EFO. The EFO should visually inspect the donated fish.

A Note About the Good Samaritan Donation Act

RCW 69.80.031 offers food donors protection from criminal and civil liability. However, it does not relieve donors and EFOs of their duty to act responsibly. The Act requires donated food be “apparently wholesome.” Animal products can visually look fine but still carry E. coli, Salmonella, or other illness-causing microbes. Food donors and EFOs should be able to help verify whether food is “apparently wholesome” by knowing how the food safety standards and how food was handled before donation.