



FACT SHEET:

The State of Alaska's "Zero Tolerance" Regulations for Preventing Oil Contamination of Seafood Products

When an oil spill occurs in Alaska state waters, there is always the potential that the spilled oil may contaminate commercial fish species. For health and safety reasons, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's (ADEC) Food Safety and Sanitation Program has always had a "zero tolerance" policy toward any contamination of food processed in Alaska. In the event of an oil spill, State regulations (18 AAC 34 Article 6) were adopted outlining the responsibilities for fishing vessels, tenders, and processing facilities to ensure contamination of commercial finfish and shellfish species does not reach the consumer.

Fishing vessel operators, tenders, buying stations, and seafood processors are required to undertake special inspection procedures when harvesting and processing seafood products from an area that may be impacted by an oil spill. ADEC may inspect any of the above to make sure that they are free of oil contamination. ADEC will certify vessels as being free of contamination, and the vessels must provide this information to tenders, buyers, and seafood processors to verify safety. Vessels involved in cleanup operations are not permitted to participate in commercial fishing activities until they have been certified clean by ADEC.

- ❖ Fishing vessel operators are required to inspect the seafood for signs of contamination as it is brought onboard. They must also inspect the fishing gear, hull, deck, fish hold, work clothes, and any other equipment that might be in contact with the seafood or fishing gear. If contaminated seafood product or fishing gear is found, the vessel operator is required to segregate the entire contaminated load from uncontaminated seafood/gear, notify ADEC upon arrival at the processor facility, and submit to an ADEC inspection.
- ❖ Tender vessels or buying stations may not accept seafood from a vessel that has been fishing in an area where spilled oil may be present, unless that vessel has been inspected by or received a waiver from ADEC. The tender or buying station must inspect the fishing gear, hull, deck, fish hold, work clothes, and any other equipment that may have been in contact with the seafood or fishing gear. If a fishing vessel is permitted to offload, the tender vessel or buying station must inspect the initial offload for signs of contamination and continue to do random inspections thereafter. The tender or buying station must maintain detailed records, and must report any contaminated seafood to ADEC.
- ❖ Seafood processors must also ensure that any vessels, tenders, or buying stations that deliver to the processor have been inspected and certified by ADEC. Processors must inspect seafood for signs of contamination both upon initial delivery and throughout the processing cycle. Upon any sign of contamination, the processor must cease operations and notify ADEC.