Wisconsin, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York and Ohio all used WinWam Package Checking Software to perform the Glazed Seafood Investigation.

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Study Shows Misbranding of Frozen Seafood

BY DAN FLYNN | MAR 31, 2010

Consumers are paying up to $23 per pound for ice when they purchase frozen seafood, a multi-state investigation led by Wisconsin Weights and Measures revealed.

Many seafood processors add a coating of ice glaze to their frozen products before packaging to preserve quality during storage and distribution. It's legal, but state and federal laws do not allow the weight of the ice to be included in the labeled weight of the seafood.

But "Weight and Measure" investigators from Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin have found consumers are being ripped off.

During a four-week investigation this past January and February, the state investigators removed 21,000 consumers' packages of frozen seafood from sale.

"In Wisconsin, inspectors in some cases found ice comprising over 40 percent of the product weight, which meant an overcharge of $6.00 per package," said Judy Cardin, Weights and Measures chief for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

Cardin said Wisconsin inspectors removed 546 packages of seafood from sale at 53 locations during the investigation. In addition to removing short weight packages from sale, Wisconsin plans further enforcement against the worst offenders.

Processors apply the ice glazing shortly after seafood is caught, and sometimes retailers are not aware of the actual percentage of ice added to the product.

Cardin said the weight and measure investigators in the 17 states that participated in the study "enforced the laws that say frozen seafood buyers pay for frozen seafood, not ice."

The National Fisheries Institute, a seafood industry association, asked for the study. "Unfortunately a few unscrupulous companies are looking for ways to increase profits by defrauding consumers with deceptive practices, making it impossible for honest businesses to compete," said NFI spokeswoman Lisa Weddig. "Consumers, retailers, and restaurants should have to pay seafood prices for ice."

One example reported by the Chicago Tribune was a two-pound bag of shrimp selling at $12.99 per pound costing $26 actually translated into $16 for the shrimp and $10 "for some melted ice."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates seafood processing companies and has issued warnings for "misbranding" for mislabeling weights on products.

The National Conference on Weights and Measures helped organize the study.

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