

Handling SHELLFISH

Best practices to protect consumers

By Sal Battaglia

From mussels to clams to oysters, shellfish is enjoyed by many people every day around the world. Whether served at a high-end restaurant or casual dining chain, customers and cooks are familiar with a wide variety of shellfish. But, surprisingly, few know how to handle these fine delicacies of the sea.

Tips to Safe Handling and Storage

Visually inspect the shellfish upon delivery. If any are broken or open, this may indicate old age or spoilage. Smell the shellfish. If a rancid odour exists, the shellfish may be spoiled.

Shellfish must remain at an appropriate temperature — between 1 and 4 C. Temperature is the single most important control in keeping shellfish safe for consumption.

If storing shellfish in a refrigerator or small cooler where the temperature can fluctuate with the door opening and closing, place a wet cloth on the shellfish and then top with ice. If the ice melts, drain the water and place more ice on the shellfish. Removing the melted ice will prevent the shellfish

from having a rancid odour and eventually spoiling.

If the shellfish arrives in a plastic bag do not keep the bag tied or closed. It is imperative air is allowed to circulate as the shellfish are still alive.

Never keep shellfish in fresh water as they will die and spoil in a very short period of time.

When delivered by a seafood supplier, shellfish should be kept for four to five days at most.

Signs of Spoilage

Like many other perishable foods, proper handling is key to avoiding spoilage and even food poisoning especially when some shellfish, such as fresh oysters, are eaten raw.

Signs of spoilage include the shellfish are broken and damaged or they have a rancid odour. While all shellfish (and fish, for that matter) have a unique smell, if the odour is one that is ammonia or oil-like, which the average person cannot bear, then it is very likely the shellfish have spoiled.

Shellfish that are open may also indicate spoilage. In the case where any shellfish are open, lightly hold their shells closed for a couple seconds. If the shellfish remain closed

when released, they are still alive. Shellfish may open with temperature or humidity changes but remain live and are safe to use.

Cooking Shellfish

It is important to scrub and clean all shellfish before cooking. Try to get rid of any sand or dirt that may exist on the shellfish.

Shellfish should be cooked until the shells open. Once opened, cook them for an additional three to five minutes. Depending on the size of the shellfish and quantity, a general guideline is seven to 15 minutes total cooking time.

Following cooking, the majority of shellfish should be open. Discard any unopened shellfish as they either failed to cook properly or the meat inside may be rotten because the mollusk died after harvesting.

Sal Battaglia is director of marketing for Seacore Seafood Inc., an importer, distributor and custom processor of a full line of fresh and frozen fish, seafood and live lobster. Contact Sal at 905.856.6222, toll-free 1.800.563.6222 or sal@seacoreseafood.com.

