



Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Environmental Health, Food Safety and Sanitation Program

555 Cordova St., Anchorage, AK 99501

Phone: (907) 269-7501 or 187-SAFE-FOOD Fax 269-7510

Classification of Commercial Shellfish Growing and Harvest Areas

Purpose:

Before shellfish can be grown or harvested for commercial sale, the area must be assessed by DEC to determine that shellfish can be safely grown or harvested.



What are "shellfish"?

Shellfish are all edible species of oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops, either shucked or in the shell, fresh or frozen, whole or in part. Scallops are excluded when the final product is the shucked adductor muscle only.



Water Testing

Growing waters must be tested and meet fecal coliform standards in the NSSP.

The first step is to determine the area boundaries:

The boundaries of a wild harvest or an aquaculture area are established by considering the natural topography, sources of natural contamination, industrial developments or human habitation, and potential for additional growing or harvesting sites within the area. This information is determined through:

- Recreational use of the area ADFG shellfish inventory studies;
- State of Alaska Aquatic Farm Applications; or
- Information provided to DEC by individuals seeking to classify areas for harvest.

Next, the potential contaminants are identified:

DEC must determine the potential impacts on water quality in the area, seasonal restrictions if any, location of water quality sampling stations, and sampling periods. This is accomplished by conducting a shoreline survey, evaluating the following information, and preparing a sanitary survey report which summarizes this information:

- Proposed boundaries and topography
- Presence of anadromous streams, wild animals, or resident and migrating bird populations
- Tides, rainfall, winds and river discharges
- Location of human habitation or industrial developments
- Fisheries
- Recreational use of the area
- Species to be grown or harvested
- Harvest periods and methods must encompass wet and dry weather, low and high tides and periods of harvest.

The growing water must be tested

Proposed growing or harvesting area waters must meet the fecal coliform standards in the NSSP. So, water samples from growing areas must be tested. The sampling period must encompass wet and dry weather, low and high tides and periods of harvest.

The number of sampling stations will depend upon the size of the area, and each actual or potential source of contamination. Generally, they are located at:

- The growing/harvesting area
- Each actual or potential source of contamination
- The boundary lines

Shellfish permit applications are available online:
http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/forms/forms_home.html

Who should I call if I have questions about Shellfish Processing?

Call: George Scanlan,
Shellfish Specialist
(907)269-7638
or email:
george.scanlan@alaska.gov



Shellfish Processing Regulations:

All shellfish processors must comply with Alaska's Seafood Processing and Inspection Regulations, and the standards for fresh or frozen shellfish relating to sanitation, harvesting, handling, shucking, and transporting contained in the **National Shellfish Sanitation Program Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish** (NSSP) and 21 CFR 1240.60 (Control of Communicable Diseases: Molluscan Shellfish).



The number of samples per station depends on human habitation at the growing/harvesting area:

- Areas with no human habitation will require a total of fifteen (15) samples per station over the sampling period.
- Areas with human habitation will require a total of thirty (30) samples per station over the sampling period.

Results from all sampling stations over the sampling period must have both a geometric mean not to exceed 14 fecal coliforms/100 ml, and no more than 10% of the samples can have greater than 28 fecal coliforms/100ml.

Water quality samples can be taken by an operator through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The person requesting the growing or harvest area classification bears the cost of getting the area classified.

The areas are the classified, and an operational status assigned:

The Sanitary Survey Report will classify the area as one of the following:

- **Approved**
- **Conditionally Approved**
- **Restricted**
- **Conditionally Restricted**
- **Prohibited** - applies to all areas not classified; all areas adjacent to sewage treatment plants; and areas with unacceptable fecal coliform or biotoxin levels which would cause the shellfish to be adulterated. An area with an unacceptable biotoxin level could be approved under a biotoxin monitoring program.

Operational Status will be designated as one of the following, and may change during a harvest period: All areas must be reclassified every year.

- **Open** - Shellfish may be harvested subject to its classification
- **Closed** - Result of sewage spill, biotoxin levels or emergency
- **Reopened** - Emergency abated, fecal coliforms, biotoxin levels or other contaminants returned to acceptable levels
- **Remote** - Lack of human habitation, not impacted by actual or potential pollution source
- **Seasonally Remote** - Area is classified as approved but a closure period is defined. One sample required before reopening.

To reclassify an area, continuing site assessments must be performed, and water samples must be collected from each sample station. Water quality reports are prepared to document that classification criteria are being met.

Fees: Initial Classification \$500 and Annual Re-approval minimum of \$300.

The assessment/sampling frequency for approved areas is listed below.

- Approved areas require five visits a year.
- Approved Remote areas require two visits a year.
- Approved Seasonally Remote areas require two visits a year, one sample required before re-opening.

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