

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. What seafood should I collect?

A. Please buy anything from the chart below. You may buy fish not listed here, but please double check against the species to avoid list. Also please do not collect shellfish other than sea scallop and lobster.


Any questions should be directed to seafoodsleuths@oceana.org

All regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Snapper (but no red snapper) ➤ Pacific or Alaska Halibut ➤ Atlantic Halibut ➤ Seabass or sea bass ➤ American or Maine Lobster* (in a dish, not in the shell) ➤ Sea scallop* ➤ Catfish
Gulf of Mexico Region, Southeast and FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Catfish ➤ Vermillion Snapper ➤ Mutton Snapper ➤ Hogfish ➤ Spanish Mackerel
Great Lakes Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Walleye ➤ Pike
Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summer Flounder ➤ Lemon Sole ➤ Vermillion Snapper

* Please avoid buying any shellfish that is not on this list.

Q. What seafood should I avoid?

A. We will not be testing seafood already covered under the new U.S. seafood traceability requirements* so please do not include these in your sampling:

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- Abalone
 - Atlantic Cod
 - Blue Crab (Atlantic)
 - Dolphinfish (Mahi Mahi)
 - Grouper
 - King Crab (red)
 - Pacific Cod
 - Red Snapper
 - Sea Cucumber
 - Sharks
 - Shrimp
 - Swordfish
 - Tunas (*Albacore, Bigeye, Skipjack, Yellowfin, and Bluefin*)

Also, please do not collect any canned seafood or ceviche.

The only shellfish we are looking for are American Lobster and Sea Scallops. Please do not buy any other type of shellfish.

*<https://www.iuufishing.noaa.gov/RecommendationsandActions/RECOMMENDATION1415/FinalRuleTraceability.aspx>

Q: What is desiccant and what does it do?

A: A desiccant is a drying agent. You may use a desiccant right in your own kitchen, such as rice in a salt shaker. The grains of rice absorb moisture and prevent the salt crystals from sticking together. In this case we used silica gel beads (SiO₂). Please don't eat the desiccant. If you do get some on your skin, it may be mildly irritating, so make sure to wash the area with soap and plenty of water.

Q. Why is it important to wash my hands and utensils before handling my fish?

A. We want to make sure that all "alien" fish DNA is removed from the fish sample you submit to us. So the cleaner the materials and hands that touch and prepare the sample are, the better. This is especially important if you prepare another type of fish sample right after you prepare Fish Sample #1. We don't want any DNA from Fish #1 to get mixed up with the DNA from Fish #2. Otherwise we may not get good DNA results.

Q. Why do you want me to take my seafood sample from the middle of my serving or fillet?

A. The fish fillet or serving is probably thickest there and is usually less "well done," if cooked. The DNA in cooked fish is best preserved when exposed to as little heat as possible.

Q: How much seafood should I put in the vial?

A: We suggest the size of a marble. This is the optimal size for getting good DNA for sequencing. This sample size should also fit into the vial easily. Please don't send more than that amount as it will not dry properly.

Q: Why are there 2 vials per seafood sample?

A: For each type of fish you sample, we want two pieces of fish per sample—one vial for each piece. Each vial is for one of the small marble-sized pieces you cut from the same fish or dish. One of the vials will be sent from our headquarters to a DNA testing lab so that the DNA can be extracted and sequenced. This sample will tell us what type of seafood you actually bought. The second vial will be archived at Oceana and used if further analysis of the sample is needed.

Q. Should I write something on the blank label on the vial bag?

A. You can write anything on this label that helps you keep track of what samples you have collected, such as date, type of seafood or vials number. Or you can leave it blank.

Q. Why is it important to leave my sample at room temperature after I put it in the vials?

A. Cool temperatures slow down the action of drying and preserving the samples. Samples that are frozen after being placed in desiccant may rot during transport through the mail at room temperature. We want the desiccant beads to completely dry the sample at room temperature first.

Q. Why are the barcode number and “sell by” date important?

A. These are used as tracking information within the seafood industry

Q. What types of observations should I put in the “additional notes” section of the data sheet?

A. You may write any additional observations or anything that doesn't fit into a specific section. For example, if you left your fish out for 5 hours after purchasing it, you would mention that here. This helps us interpret results when we get them. Also note here if the information on your receipt is different from what you saw at the fish counter or on the menu.

Q. What does Oceana plan on doing with this information?

A. Oceana will analyze your results as part of our efforts to fight seafood fraud. Oceana will release the results in aggregate form in an upcoming report. You will not get your specific results back.

Q. Can I submit other types of fish to be tested that are not on the list?

A. Ideally you will sample from the fish that we highlighted, but if there is another regionally significant fish, you may sample that. Please do not send us any of the 13 types of seafood already being traced: Any seafood labeled abalone, cod, grouper, shrimp, shark, swordfish, tuna, mahi mahi, crab, or red snapper (other “snapper” okay). Also, please do not send other types shellfish, canned seafood or ceviche.

Q: What if I want to sample more seafood?

A. Please contact us the Oceana staff person who provided you with your sampling kits. Or you can email SeafoodSleuths@oceana.org with your name and address and we will be happy to send you another kit if we need additional samples.

Q. I do not have a Google account, so I cannot fill out the digital data form. How do I submit my data?

A. You can download printable copies of the [data sheet at this link](#). Please fill out data sheets manually for each sample you collect and include with your samples you mail to Oceana.

Q. I filled out the digital data sheet about my sample. Do I also need to submit the paper data sheet with the samples I mail to Oceana?

A. Yes, please include a paper data sheet for each sample mailed to Oceana. We appreciate you entering the data digitally, but also need the paper sheet. Data redundancy is important to us.

Q: What is a government inspection label?

A: There are a number of inspection labels that may be on the seafood label, including "Grade A," "HACCP," or some other label. You can see examples of some labels here: <http://www.seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov/AdPolicy.pdf>. Whatever label is on the package, please describe it on the data sheet.

Q. Why can't I sample canned seafood or ceviche?

A. The additives and high temperatures used in processing canned seafood and the acid in ceviche (from the lemon or lime juice) can deform the DNA so that it cannot be sequenced.

Q. I got two samples from the same place. Do I have to write out all the same purchasing information on both data sheets?

A. No. Please fill in your name, vial number and date prepared on the second data sheet. For any information that is same as that recorded on your first data sheet, you can write "see other data sheet."

Q. What if I have more questions?

A. Please email any additional questions to seafoodsleuths@oceana.org