

# FRESH FISH

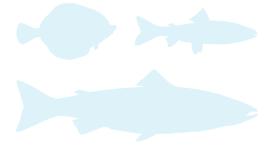


The general rule is that all animal products – meat, poultry, eggs, etc. – donated to an Emergency Food Organization (EFO) must meet the same standards as animal products sold in a retail store. There are a few exceptions to this rule for some lower risk foods. Donors and EFOs can take steps to help assure that a well-intended contribution can be safely delivered to people in need. This guide addresses donations for fish.

Taking fish from state waters is highly regulated. People with valid recreational or commercial fishing licenses may take only specific types and sizes of fish from only specific state waters. Both recreational and commercial fisherman sometimes land “bycatch,” fish that is not the correct size or type. EFOs may not accept bycatch as possession of bycatch is unauthorized.

One notable exemption to that rule is on rare occasions the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may donate bycatch confiscated from fishermen or processors. In that case, you will need to schedule a food pantry representative to pick up the fish. WDFW will provide you with an authorization letter for transport that will have instructions to help safely transport the fish to the food pantry facility. WDFW also donates surplus adult fish from hatcheries on occasion.

# FRESH FISH Donations Guide



## Donation

Whether a donation comes via a private citizen, business or a Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) run hatchery they all must follow the same rules. Please check with your local health jurisdiction for more specific food safety information.

## Food Safety

Donated fish should be minimally processed. This means that the heads will be removed, the abdominal cavity will be eviscerated to remove the guts and must be temperature regulated. Fish must be kept at an internal temperature of 41°F or below on ice or in a cooler.

Fish may also come as fish in the round, meaning that the fish come whole without processing. This may be how some WDFW hatchery donations arrive. Fish in the round still need to be kept at 41°F or below and should be kept on ice or in a cooler. They will need to be distributed immediately i.e. within a few hours of receiving the fish at the EFO.

## Minimal Processing

Gutting fish received from WDFW hatchery donations is allowed at the food pantry-level as long as proper hand-washing and cross contamination prevention steps are followed. Please still discuss this process with your local health jurisdiction.

At all stages of processing and transport, fish not acquired from a retail establishment must be accompanied by the written statement identifying the name and address of the person who harvested the fish; the license, permit or tag number; the number and kind of animal provided; the date killed; the county and area where it was taken; and the fisherman’s signature.



Washington  
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**FOOD  
ASSISTANCE**



An EFO possessing a game fish not acquired from a retail establishment must have a signed, written statement identifying the person who caught the fish; the license, permit or tag number; and other details to confirm that the fish was caught legally.

To the right, you will see a step-by-step guide for donating legally caught fish to a EFO. Please work with your Food Safety Contact at each step to ensure a safe and wholesome donation.

**EFO:** Emergency Food Organization (food banks, food pantries, meal programs)

**WDFW:** WA Department of Fish and Wildlife

**WSDA:** WA Department of Agriculture

**Jurisdiction:** Local or county health department or district



Washington  
State Department of  
Agriculture

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## Visual Inspection

Donated fish requires emphasis on visual inspection cues.

- The eyes of the fish should be clear, plump, wet and shiny.
- The tail and dorsal fins should be healthy-looking, wet and intact.
- The fish should feel cold, wet and slippery, but not sticky.
- When pressed, it should spring back.
- The gills should be bright red. The gills should also feel clean and cold, not slimy.

## Transportation/Storage

When transporting fish, it must be temperature controlled. Fresh fish should be kept at 41°F or below and frozen fish must be kept frozen at all times.

## Private Citizen

An EFO must not accept meat from a private citizen because the EFO cannot sufficiently verify proper handling of this high-risk food (even if the donor is known to the EFO as a decent and reliable person).

## A Note About the Good Samaritan Donation Act

RCW 69.80.031 offers food donors protection from criminal and civil liability. The act, however, is not a “get-out-of-jail-free” card relieving donors and EFOs of the duty of acting responsibly. The act requires that the donated food be “apparently wholesome.” Animal products can look just fine but still carry E. coli, salmonella or other disease. Therefore, verifying whether animal products are, in fact, “apparently wholesome” requires knowing whether the food has been handled in accordance with suitable food safety standards.