

Anglers, Bait and VHS FAQ

Q: Can I use dead fish for bait?

A –Only if they were caught on the water you are fishing or have been preserved in a manner that does not require refrigeration or freezing. If they were alive when you started fishing, you can use those unpreserved dead fish (fish that died in the bait bucket) while fishing that day. After you leave the lake they must be treated the same as all other dead bait and preserved before they can be used again. You can also use commercially produced dead baits as long as they do not require refrigeration. Dead bait of any type can be used on Lake Michigan and waters of Green Bay or on the water where the bait was harvested.

Q: What are the rules about frozen bait (smelt)?

A –Frozen bait **CANNOT** be used on any water other than where they were caught, unless they are first thawed and then preserved in a method that does not require refrigeration or freezing for long term storage. Other methods include, pickling in alcohol or mineral oil or drying in a salt/borax mixture. See the DNR VHS website for more details at <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/vhs.html>.

Q: Do I have to kill all fish (harvested gamefish and bait) before I leave the landing?

A -No, as long as you remove the liquid water from the container the fish are in (livewell or bait bucket) before you leave the shore and you do not try to revive them later, they are considered dead for the purpose of the transportation rules.

Q: How do I properly dispose of my minnows?

A – In a trash can at the boat landing or access point if one is available. Otherwise, you should take the minnows home and dispose of them in the trash, compost them or use them in a garden for fertilizer. Another option: water-free, dead minnows can be taken home and preserved with one of the suggested preservation methods and then used at a later date.

Q: When are fish or fish eggs considered to be DEAD vs. LIVE?

A -Fish that are handled in a manner meant to keep them alive or eggs fertilized for the purpose of propagation will be considered live fish or fish eggs. Fish in a container that has been drained of water will be considered dead.

Q: Is it ok to transport dead fish that have eggs inside of them?

A -Yes, as long as the eggs are not removed later and fertilized for the purpose of producing fish.

Q: Can I leave the bulk of my minnows in my vehicle or away from the shore at the landing and take a few minnows out on the lake at a time so I will not have to kill all of them at the end of the day?

A –Yes. Any minnows that are never possessed on the water, or the shore or bank of the water, can be transported to other locations, such as home at the end of the day. Any minnows possessed on the water, bank of shore, may not be transported away live. Minnows in a vehicle parked on the bank or shore, including while launching or loading a boat would be considered possessed on the bank or shore and may not be transported away live. For instance, you can leave a cooler of minnows in your vehicle at the landing, away from the bank or shore and then return to stock up on minnows as you run out. One thing to remember is that to comply with this rule you must remove the container holding the minnows from the vehicle before using that vehicle to launch or load your boat so they are never possessed on the bank or shore of the water.

Q: Can I leave baitfish in a bait bucket or live box in the lake for use at a later date?

A –Yes, as long as the container is clearly and legibly marked with your name and address. Containers may not be left on or attached to public property and you must have permission before attaching to any private property.

Q: Can I leave unused bait in a container in or under the ice of my ice house for use next time on the same lake?

A –Yes, you may submerge a container holding live baitfish under your ice house as long as you have a way to retrieve the container (i.e. a rope affixed to the container and ice house). You must also follow the rule that fishing holes cut in the ice may not be greater than 12" in diameter. Minnows may also be left inside the ice house for use later on that water.

Q: If I bring baitfish brought onto the ice do they have to be killed before I leave the shore?

A –Yes, when you bring baitfish to the shore, whether the water is open or frozen, those baitfish may not be transported away live, and all water must be drained immediately upon leaving the lake.

Q: Does "leaving the bank or shore" include walking from my dock to my lakeside cottage or home? In other words, may I legally take a bucket of minnows or a container of leeches from my dock to my house or garage (or that of a friend) on that lake for storage and use the next time I go fishing on that lake?

A –You may do this type of storage as long the home or cottage is located on the bank or shore and the bait does not go anywhere besides back to the lake they are being stored next to. Those minnows and water [or leech water] cannot leave that house or garage alive except to go back to the lake where you were previously fishing with them. Leeches can be revived with tap or well water once you leave the lake.

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Q: Besides draining the water from my boat, trailer, motor, bilge, live wells, bait containers, etc., what else can I do to make sure I do not transport this disease to other waters I also use my boat on?

A -The virus that causes VHS can survive in water for up to 2 weeks. You can sanitize your boat, trailer and equipment by washing it with a mixture of 1/2 cup of household bleach per 5 gallons of water. Allowing your boat and trailer to completely dry out will reduce the risk of infecting other waters.

Q: Are there any additional restrictions on the use of other types of live bait, such as worms, leeches, insects or their larva?

A -No, other types of live baits such as worms, leeches, insects, larvae, are generally still legal to use. However, under the emergency rules, all water is required to be drained from all equipment and containers used for fishing. This includes water in containers that may contain leeches or aquatic insects. If you plan to add water later to keep this type of bait alive, you should add water from a safe source like a well or tap.

Q: Do I have to drain the water from my drinking water containers and coolers, including melted ice in coolers used to keep fish or food & beverages cold?

A – No. This rule does not apply to beverage containers, including bottled drinking water. Melted ice in coolers used to keep dead fish fresh also needs to be drained, but the ice which has not yet melted may be kept to keep your fish, food or beverages cool.

Q: I like to maintain native fish in my home aquarium; can I catch fish and bring them home for this purpose?

A – No, any live fish taken from a wild source would be illegal. If you would like fish for your home aquarium, you should purchase the fish from a fish hatchery, bait shop or licensed bait harvester.

Q: The new rules say that I can trap minnows for bait, but I may only use them in the same waterbody where they were trapped. What constitutes the “same waterbody”?

A – Use the rule of “wet feet”. If you can wade or boat to any spot once you are on the water with the bait, it would be considered the same water from an enforcement standpoint. Those minnows cannot leave the water alive and must be killed before you leave, though you can preserve them for use as dead bait.

Q: How does the rule apply to tournaments that wish to have an offsite weigh in?

A – Tournaments may not transport live fish to an offsite weigh in unless they have a tournament permit from the DNR that specifically allows the transport. If allowed, the permit will contain appropriate restrictions such as all tournament participants who will be transporting live fish must have a copy of the permit while transporting them.

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Q: What should I do if I see a fish kill or diseased fish?

A – It is not uncommon to see a few dead fish from time to time that die from natural causes. However, if you see large numbers of dead or dying fish or see fish covered with red spots, you may report the sighting to the DNR by calling the local DNR service center, fish biologist, warden or calling the toll free Hotline number at 1-800-TIP-WDNR. Make note of the waterbody, date, fish species, and approximate number of dead/dying fish. If you caught a suspicious looking fish, place the fish in a plastic bag and then in a cooler on ice.

For more information, see the DNR website at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/vhs.html>

Or Call the DNR Call Center

At

1-888-WDNRINFO

(1-888-936-7463)