

Proposed international standard for Cadmium could have huge consequences

Codex Alimentarius, the body which establishes international standards for the World Health Organization, is considering setting the standard for cadmium (Cd) at 1 ppm as the maximum level in molluscan shellfish. If this occurs, there will be huge consequences for the West Coast shellfish industry.

The Pacific Ocean has naturally high levels of Cd and geological formations in the Northwest also contain high levels of the metal. Molluscan shellfish - Pacific oysters and scallops in particular - have the ability to bioaccumulate Cd.

Hong Kong has already reduced their maximum allowable level to 2 ppm. A shipment of B.C. oysters to Hong Kong was rejected when they exceeded this number, and as a result, Pacific oysters were sampled from around Vancouver Island, B.C.. The mean from 81 samples was 2.63 ppm. More than 60% of the samples exceeded 2 ppm. Washington had its first shipment of oysters (from the Hood Canal) rejected from Hong Kong earlier this year. Subsequent processing of 25 samples of Hood Canal oysters by the Department of Health found levels ranging from 1.2 – 4.9 ppm. The European Union adopted the even stricter standard of 1 ppm as a maximum level in January of this year. The oyster industry in France is having problems meeting the standard during high rainfall.

There is an eight step process for Codex to adopt a new international standard. The new standard for Cd in molluscan shellfish reached Step 5 but in 2002 was moved back to /Step 3. At their 2003 meeting in March, Codex continued the debate at Step 3. At this step, comments and information are solicited from member countries. Those comments are due the end of September. After Codex adopts a standard, WHO member countries generally follow suit. If the U.S. adopts 1 ppm as their standard, this will preclude interstate and international shipping of shellfish in excess of that standard.

Bill Dewey has taken lead on this issue for PCSGA and has been coordinating with ISSC and FDA. Dr. Terry Troxell with the USFDA represents the United States on the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants. Bill is attempting to coordinate some broad Cd sampling that will give the industry a better understanding of their vulnerability. It is pretty clear a 1 ppm level will be a show- stopper for the Pacific oyster industry. Contact Bill at 360-426-6178 if you have questions or would like to participate in sampling.

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