

## USGS – National Wildlife Health Center INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLECTION AND SHIPMENT OF SPECIMENS



### Contact the NWHC Field Epidemiology Team

Email: [NWHC-epi@usgs.gov](mailto:NWHC-epi@usgs.gov), Phone: 608-270-2480, Fax: 608-270-2415

For Hawaii/Pacific Islands shipping instructions, contact Thierry Work.

Email: [thierry\\_work@usgs.gov](mailto:thierry_work@usgs.gov), Phone: 808-792-9520

The following instructions should be used for collecting and shipping wildlife carcasses, carcass parts, and samples extracted from animals to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) in Madison, Wisconsin, to ensure adequate and well preserved specimens.

- Complete the “Wildlife Mortality Reporting and Diagnostic Services Request Form” and email/fax it to the NWHC epidemiology team to initiate discussion of the case you would like to submit and get shipping approval. **Packages will not be opened if form does not arrive first.**
- For most cases, NWHC prefers to receive fresh chilled specimens if they can be sent within 24-36 hours of collection or death, as freezing/thawing impedes isolation of some pathogens and causes tissue damage. As a general guideline: if you cannot call or ship within 24-36 hours, immediately freeze the animal(s) and keep frozen during shipment.
- Specimens should be shipped by 1-day (overnight) service, Monday through Wednesday, to guarantee arrival at NWHC before the weekend. If specimens are fresh and need to be shipped on Thursday or Friday, prior arrangements must be made. Email/fax shipment tracking number to NWHC.
- Collect animals under the assumption that an infectious disease or toxin is involved and other animals may be at risk. Protect yourself as some diseases and toxins are hazardous to humans. Use rubber, vinyl, or nitrile gloves when picking up sick or dead animals. If you do not have gloves, invert a plastic bag over your hand and use it as a glove to scoop specimen directly in to the bag.
- More than one disease may be affecting the population simultaneously. When possible, collect both sick and dead animals. Note behavior of sick animals before euthanizing. Record on carcass tags and “Wildlife Mortality Reporting and Diagnostic Services Request Form” which animals were euthanized.
- Collect specimens that are representative of all species and geographic areas involved.
- Suitable specimens should have intact body, eyes, and body cavity; have no maggots; and have no foul odors. Decomposed or scavenged carcasses are usually of limited diagnostic value. If you plan to collect animals in the field, take along a cooler containing ice to immediately chill carcasses.
- Contact NWHC for assistance when collecting specimens or samples from animals that are too large to ship. Other specimens might also require unique collection and shipping instructions (e.g., amphibians, bats, snakes); contact NWHC.
- Immediately attach a leg tag to each animal with the following information in pencil or waterproof ink:
  - Date collected
  - Location (specific site, town, county, state)
  - Collector (name/address/phone)
  - Species
  - Found dead or euthanized
  - Your reference #
- Place each animal in a separate plastic bag, close, and seal the bag. Cover zipper bag closure with strapping or duct tape after sealing zipper. Twist non-zipper bags closed, fold over on itself, and secure with package strapping or duct tape.



- Place 1<sup>st</sup> bag inside a 2<sup>nd</sup> bag, close and seal. More than one individually bagged animal can be placed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> bag. This prevents cross-contamination of individual specimens and leaking shipping containers.
- Tag the outside of 2<sup>nd</sup> bag and list number of animals and type, date collected, location, and name of collector.  
**Reminder order: TAG, BAG, BAG, TAG.**
- Use a hard-sided cooler in good condition for shipment. Close the drain plug of cooler and tape over inside. Line cooler with a thick bag (1 mil thickness, 3<sup>rd</sup> layer of bags).
- Place absorbent material in the 3<sup>rd</sup> plastic bag to absorb any liquids that might leak during shipping.  
**See appendix for examples of bags and absorbent materials.**
- Pack individually bagged animal(s) contained within the 2<sup>nd</sup> sealed bag into the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag with enough FROZEN BLUE ICE PACKS or similar coolant to keep carcasses cold. Use enough coolant to keep samples chilled if there is a delay in delivery.
  - Blue ice (unfrozen) can be obtained at hardware, sporting goods, or grocery stores.
  - Wet ice can be used if frozen in a sealed plastic container (i.e., soda or water bottle).
  - Do not ship using dry ice.**
- Seal the 3<sup>rd</sup> bag with methods described for 1<sup>st</sup> bag.
- Place the completed “Wildlife Mortality Reporting and Diagnostic Services Request Form” and return shipping label (if you want the cooler returned) in a Ziploc bag and tape to the inside lid of the cooler. NWHC cannot pay for shipping.
- Tape the cooler shut around the lid and at each end using a continuous wrap around the cooler.
- Attach the shipping document (airbill) with the information below to the outside of each cooler in a resealable pouch. Also attach “to” and “from” addresses and phone numbers directly to the cooler.

To Address:

**Necropsy Loading Dock**  
**National Wildlife Health Center**  
**6006 Schroeder Road**  
**Madison, WI 53711**  
**608-270-2480**

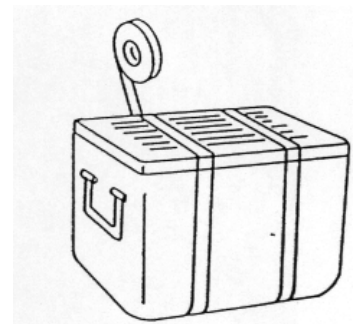
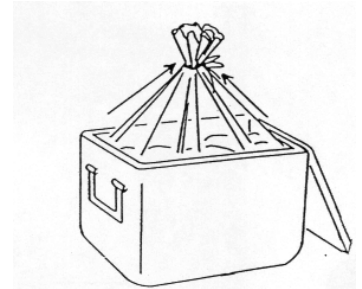
From Address/Emergency Contact:

**Your Agency’s Address**  
**Your Phone Number**

Supplementary Labels:

**Keep Cold**

- Mark the cooler with the appropriate information:  
 (See last page of these instructions for printable marking labels – do not shrink size of labels)
  - Carcasses of animals that died of unknown causes:  
**UN3373 and BIOLOGICAL SUBSTANCE, CATEGORY B.**
  - Blood and tissue samples from dead or sick animals:  
**UN3373 and BIOLOGICAL SUBSTANCE, CATEGORY B.**
  - Blood and tissue samples from apparently healthy animals (hunter-killed, live captured):  
**EXEMPT ANIMAL SPECIMENS.**
- Note the shipment tracking number in case packages are delayed.
- These instructions cover shipping regulations for commercial carriers.



**Appendix:**

Example of bags available at large supermarkets (list not all inclusive):

**Inner and second layer bags:**

Hefty Big Bag – 22 gal

Hefty Freezer – 1 gal

Hefty Jumbo – 2.5 gal

Ziploc Freezer – 1 gallon

Ziploc Big Bag – 20 gallon

Glad Freezer – 1 qt, 2 qt, 1 gal

**Third layer for cooler liner:**

Hefty Cinch Sak (1.1 mil) – 33 and 39 gal

Hefty Lawn and Leaf (1.1 mil) – 33 and 39 gal

House brand large trash (1.1 mil) – 30 gal

Glad Force Flex (1.05 mil) – 25 gal

Hefty Ultra Flex (1.3 mil) – 30 gal

House Lawn - Leaf (1.2 mil) – 39 gal

**Absorbent material:**

Super absorbent packet or pads for water

Paper towels

Do not use packing peanuts or shredded paper.

Cellulose wadding

Cotton batting or cotton balls



**BIOLOGICAL SUBSTANCES, CATEGORY B**

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**EXEMPT ANIMAL  
SPECIMENS**