

San Diego Sushi Probe Nets Phony Lobster Roll Sellers



'Tis the season for California Spiny Lobster catch, but an investigation by the San Diego City Attorney's Office has found that lobsters don't always make their way into the "lobster rolls" served at local sushi restaurants. A "truth-in-menu" investigation was launched to see if San Diego consumers were the victims of seafood fraud. It resulted in criminal convictions of eight sushi restaurant operators.



San Diego City Attorney Jan Goldsmith

Investigators with the Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit of the Office of the City Attorney purchased advertised "lobster rolls" from various sushi restaurants throughout San Diego, then sent them to a laboratory where DNA testing confirmed that no trace of lobster was present in any of the rolls.

Instead of lobster, substitution of various types of less expensive seafood such as crawfish or Pollock was evident. Follow-up restaurant inspections by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the City's investigator found no lobster on the premises of any of the businesses.

City Attorney Jan Goldsmith, expressing disappointment with the food fraud findings, stated: "The public should be able to count on truthful advertising from anyone doing business in San Diego. Honest customer service is not only required by law, it is good business. "Our office will continue to prosecute businesses that lie to their consumers."

The undisclosed substitution of the cheaper seafood is a criminal violation of California law that prohibits the adulteration of food and the false advertising or misbranding of food items. Along with fines, state law also

requires the offending businesses to reimburse all of the investigation costs.

The eight sushi restaurants paid a total of \$14,000 in fines and more than \$5,000 to reimburse investigative costs and were ordered to change menus and other advertising to reflect the true content of their seafood rolls.

The convicted businesses were named as follows:

- Wonderful Sushi at 13185-3 Black Mountain Road and 1288 University Avenue
- Little Tokyo at 11640 Carmel Mountain Road, #122
- Edamami Sushi & Roll at 5950 Santo Road, #G
- Ikiru Sushi at 2850 Womble Road, #105
- OB Sushi at 4967 Newport Avenue
- Riki Sushi at 3930 30th Street
- RB Sushi 2 at 5973 El Cajon Boulevard

Meanwhile, a seafood fraud report published by Oceana, a non-government organization advocating ocean conservation, says that Los Angeles and Orange County had the highest national seafood substitution rates at 52%. While it is not always clear if the substitution happens in the restaurant, within the seafood distribution channel or elsewhere, the investigation in San Diego clearly identified the problem at the restaurant level.