

When my father would take us camping, the excitement began with a trip to the ice house in East Weymouth. The wooden warehouse setting, the loading dock taller than I was, and the huge doors opening to the cool dark interior were filled with mystery and the promise of large blocks of ice for our trip. The large chunk, chipped only as needed with an ice pick, would last longer than ice cubes. Juice and milk went into the bottom of the cooler surrounded by chopped ice. Items such as cheese and meat went on the tray near the top of the cooler.

My methodical father was very particular about order and cleanliness, even when camping. I am really not sure though if he was thinking about food safety, though, as he kept the food out of the ice. I suspect he was mainly concerned about the quality of the food. After all, the best we could do was wrap it in plastic wrap or aluminum foil. I think we had some plastic wrap. It certainly was available, as it was invented by Ralph Wiley when he was working in the lab for Dow Chemicals in 1933. (It is made from Saran polyvinylidene chloride - so he gave it the name 'Saran'. I digress here but this discovery is connected to Little Orphan Annie and the military. Fascinating stuff!)

As I recall, the plastic cling wrap wasn't used then in the fifty's as much as wax paper and aluminum foil, though. I know we did not have "Tupperware". Although Earl Tupper, a chemist, invented the plastic containers right here in Massachusetts in 1946, those home parties had not begun and my mother definitely did not have time for that!

So, off we went with blocks of ice that were hauled by scary looking hooks and large hands sporting leather gloves. Those gloves were to protect the hands from the cold; not to protect the ice from being contaminated. That is the difference between the 1950's and now. We have a food code to protect us. Well, it protects us if it is followed.

If you "Google" ice safety, you are likely to see tips on when it is safe to go ice skating or ice fishing. While that is very important, health agents want the ice cubes that make contact with food, including those in people's beverages, to be safe.

"Ice...the Forgotten Food" is a slogan borrowed from the International Packaged Ice Association (IPIA). The IPIA has used this slogan for many years to bring awareness to the need for ice to be safe for consumption, for they recognize ice as a food. They were founded in 1917! That is impressive considering that ice used to be cut from frozen ponds. That ice was used for insulated "ice boxes" though, to keep the air cool for food preservation. It was not for eating or putting in drinks. I suppose it is difficult for most people to imagine their daily iced coffee or evening cocktail without ice cubes. It is not appreciated as the luxury that it is.

Most of those freezers you see outside of convenience and package stores are purchasing those bags of ice from a distributor. It is worth your while to check out the company name on them. It is worthwhile for health agents, also, for ALL foods have to be from an approved source, including ice. An approved source means that it is permitted and inspected. Once the purchase has been made from that approved source, it is up to everyone along the route, from factory to truck driver to convenience store, to treat it with respect. Temperatures have to be

held and, in the case of ice, keeping the bags clean, without holes and avoiding any means of contaminating the little frozen delicacy we all take for granted.

Some establishments have a large ice machine for producing ice cubes to bag and sell to the public. That has to have its own permit and they have to treat it as food and avoid any means of contamination.

The next time you buy a bag of ice, please don't drop it in the parking lot or your driveway to break up the cubes. That action creates tiny holes in the bag, bringing in whatever is on the ground or parking lot. You can only imagine what lurks on the surface of a parking lot! Do you want that in your next drink?

If you must drop it, drop it onto a towel or clean trash bag, or, have fun with an old fashioned ice pick.

Restaurants all have their own ice machines and it is the health agent's job to inspect it during routine inspections. Mildew grows very nicely in the cold wet environment. Timely cleanings on the part of the establishment are necessary.

So, don't forget that one of your favorite seemingly non-foods is definitely a food!

For as short video on the importance of safe ice, please look at

<https://youtu.be/ZM-Vq63SiVc>

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