

# TROPHY CARE TIP

## *Care on Fish to be Mounted*

You never know when you are going to catch that fish of a lifetime and will want to display it proudly in your home. Will you know what to do when you hook your trophy fish?

I would like to share some of the techniques that I've seen customers use in taking care of their fish. Some of these methods are good ways to prepare them for getting it to the taxidermists and some of them are just pitiful.

Let's start with what I feel is the most correct way to freeze a fish until it can be taken to a taxidermy artists studio. I tell my customers that once you have caught that trophy to take an old bath towel and soak it in water. Not damp but wet, wet, wet! Then roll the fish up in the towel, place the rolled up towel inside a plastic bag and freeze it solid until you find the time or money to have it mounted. The sooner you take it to your taxidermist the better; however a fish that is prepared in this manner can last in most freezers for up to 12 months and still be in perfect condition. If it gets to be any longer than 10-12 months I recommend that you take the fish out and rewet the towel.

The water on the towel will do two very important things. First it prevents freezer burn which can make the skinning process very tough or even impossible and the fins cannot be spread open to their fullest extent. Secondly the towel will also protect the tail fin from breakage. This is an area that is often overlooked. The wet frozen towel wrapped around the tail fin acts like a splint or cast, keeping it from breaking or being damaged while in the freezer. Most customers do not even realize that they have broken the tail fin in two or more pieces when they bring it in frozen just in a plastic bag. This is a lovely surprise that the taxidermist must deal with because the customer swore it was in perfect condition.

Some fishermen think that they are doing a good thing by wrapping wet newspaper around their fish and then freezing it. Why not? They think I'm not going to give up my old beach towel when I can put newspaper on it. Wrong again! Newspaper never gets fully wet. It takes a long time to saturate newspaper inside and out. What happens when supposed wet newspaper is placed around the fish and frozen is that the paper draws moisture out of the fish like a sponge causing freezer burn extremely fast. Also have you ever tried to remove half frozen wet newspaper from off of a fish in your sink?

I see fish with aluminum foil wrapped around them and I have no explanation for this. Why? Saran wrap may work a little better but again; Why?

I get a chuckle out of the fishermen who are also on a Fire Departments Life Squad because they bring their fish in duct taped to a flat board in a straight position as though it may have a broken neck or a back injury. This is unnecessary.

### THINGS NOT TO DO:

Do not leave a fish that has died in water, on a stringer, in a live-well, or in a cooler on melting ice. A dead fish skin will absorb water, similar to what our fingers do from swimming too

long. This swelling *of* the skin causes the scales to loosen and fall out. This makes the skinning process difficult and your fish will not have those lost scales replaced. This happens a lot with Striped Bass. You go to Lake Cumberland, fish all day, we put our trophy fish in the cooler *of* ice for the road trip home. By the time you get home the fish is soaking in a cooler *of* melted ice. You take your trophy and drive around bragging and showing it off to 20 *of* your closest mends. Meanwhile the scales are beginning to slip. The next afternoon we may think about taking it to our local taxidermist but it has already sat in melted ice water for nearly 24 hours.

Yes it still looks good from the outside but I can guarantee that it will have scales dropping off when it is skinned. But remember" *it is always the taxidermists fault.*" NOT!

Try placing it in a plastic bag prior to putting it in the ice chest for the road trip home. This can mean the difference between an O.K. mount and a quality mount.

I hope that these tips will get your mind thinking about keeping your trophy fish in the best condition possible so that your taxidermists can provide you with the best quality mount that you deserve.

Master Taxidermist,  
Dave Noem