

DHS news release
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Elevated levels of PCBs in resident fish from Portland Harbor

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), in cooperation with Multnomah County Health Department, is advising the public today of high levels of PCBs in fish caught from Portland Harbor, in the lower Willamette River.

Due to the high levels of PCBs found in fish sampled within Portland Harbor, DHS has developed special recommendations for the areas between Sauvie Island and the Fremont Bridge.

DHS is issuing special restrictions for Portland Harbor due to sampling performed in 2002 and 2003. The results from these tests have shown elevated levels of PCBs in some of the resident fish collected in Portland Harbor, especially in carp, bass and catfish.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are highly persistent chemicals that can build up in the foodchain. PCBs may cause various health effects, including cancer and liver, thyroid, immune system and developmental effects.

The tests show the average level of PCBs to be high in carp (average of 1.92 ppm), bass (1.12 ppm) and catfish (0.511 ppm). Levels of PCBs were lower in sturgeon* and crappie and very low in salmon. The recommended limits for consumption of fish from Portland Harbor are:

- Women of childbearing age, particularly pregnant or breastfeeding women, children and people with weak immune systems, thyroid or liver problems, should avoid eating resident fish from Portland Harbor, especially carp, bass and catfish.
- Healthy women beyond childbearing age and healthy adult males should restrict the amount of resident fish eaten from Portland Harbor to no more than one 8-ounce meal per month.
- Non-resident fish, such as salmon and steelhead, are considered an excellent high-protein, low-fat food source and have no restrictions on the amount eaten from Portland Harbor.

In 2001, a consolidated advisory was issued for the mainstem of the Willamette River based on levels of mercury, PCBs, dioxins and pesticides in resident fish. The new advisory for Portland Harbor applies only to the section of the Willamette River between Sauvie Island and the Fremont Bridge. People who eat fish from other parts of the Willamette River should refer to the existing mainstem Willamette advisory issued in 2001.

Anglers are encouraged to practice catch-and-release fishing for carp, bass and catfish, especially larger specimens, because older and larger fish have greater amounts of PCBs in their tissues. Because PCBs tend to accumulate in the fat, skin and organs, exposure to consumers can be significantly reduced by cooking, especially if the fish is grilled, broiled or baked. Preparation methods to help reduce exposure include removing the skin, belly, back and side fat, as well as discarding the eggs, eyes, head and organs of the fish.

Fish is known to be an excellent source of nutrients with numerous beneficial health effects. DHS encourages fishing and eating of fish such as salmon and steelhead caught in Portland Harbor.

**Please note that the sturgeon sampled from Portland Harbor were fairly small (about 40 inches long). Larger and older sturgeon would be expected to have higher levels of PCBs and should be restricted like carp, bass and catfish.*