NEWS RELEASE
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ADPH issues fish consumption advisories for 2002

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Analyses of fish samples collected during the fall of 2001 in water bodies throughout Alabama generally indicate that the quality of water in the state has improved over the past year. This improvement is documented by a general lack of detection or by lower levels of contaminants in the fish sampled when compared to previous years.

Last fall the Alabama Department of Environmental Management collected fish which are representative species from various water bodies throughout the state. These fish were analyzed for 21 different materials including contaminants, pesticides and heavy metals to which the fish might have been exposed. Fish were also examined for body appearance, lipid content, age and weight.

Fish serve as a good indicator of the health of a water body. If contaminants are present, they can bioaccumulate in fish. The contaminant enters the food supply through either crustaceans or bottom feeding fish in a given area. These species are eaten by larger and more aggressive species, thereby transferring the contaminant from the species consumed to the consumer.

When individuals catch fish for their own consumption, they then consume whichever contaminants are present in the fish they are eating. Safety levels recommended by the Food and Drug Administration are used as guides to levels of specific contaminants that might be consumed without incurring an excessive risk from exposure to the contaminant.

The Alabama Department of Public Health reviewed the results from these analyses and determined the possible risk to which individuals might be exposed following consumption of fish that contained any of these potentially harmful materials.

Mercury levels were above FDA guideline levels of one part per million in samples of largemouth bass and spotted bass from the Escatawpa River and in largemouth bass from the Fowl River, Fish River, Chickasaw River and Styx River.

Fish were sampled from a number of water bodies within the state that had not been sampled recently, or at any time. No or very low detectable levels of contaminants were found to have bioaccumulated in bass and catfish from Aliceville, Gainesville, Demopolis and Coffeeville reservoirs in the Tombigbee River basin, the Pickwick Reservoir in the Tennessee River basin, and Big Creek Reservoir in the Escatawpa River basin.

Similar results were recorded in samples collected from various collection stations on the Mobile River, the Tensaw River, Hog Bayou, Bay Minette Creek, Sandy Creek, Wolf Creek, Bon Secour Bay, Mobile Bay, Portersville Bay and Weeks Bay. These fish showed no levels of bioaccumulation of contaminants that exceeded FDA guidelines for safety.

During this sampling cycle, ADEM also sampled fish from below bleach kraft paper plants. Generally, if dioxins or furans, byproducts of the processes by which these types of paper are manufactured, were to be produced and released into surrounding waters, fish in these areas would tend to bioaccumulate them.

Bass and catfish sampled from sites below discharges from these mills located on the Coosa, Tombigbee and Alabama rivers showed no accumulations of these contaminants. This indicates the positive effect on the environment that has occurred since paper mills adopted procedures to reduce/eliminate the production of dioxins or furans in the formulation of paper pulp.

Even though there have been overall improvements in water quality, the Alabama Department of Public Health is issuing two new fish consumption advisories for 2002 and is keeping all existing advisories in effect pending the collection of more data. The two additional advisories are for the Styx and Escatawpa rivers.

A no consumption advisory is recommended for largemouth bass on the Styx River; a limited consumption advisory is issued for channel catfish on this river. This means no one should eat fish largemouth bass from the specified area. A limited consumption advisory means that women of childbearing age and children less than 15 years of age should not consume channel catfish, and other people are advised to eat no more than one meal per month of channel catfish from the affected area.

The health department recommends a no consumption advisory on the Escatawpa River for largemouth or spotted bass. This means that people are advised not to eat either largemouth or spotted bass from this river, due to the presence of methylmercury in the fish sampled.

The numbers of fish showing the presence and levels of mercury considered to be harmful to health warrant imposing a no consumption advisory for these water bodies. In addition, the presence of one largemouth bass sampled from the Tensaw River also exceeded FDA levels for mercury. Because this was one fish of six collected, and because the level of mercury was not found at an alarming level, a limited consumption advisory is being recommended for this area.

Fish consumption advisories are offered as guidance to individuals who wish to consume the fish they catch from various water bodies in Alabama. These listings and other information are available on the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at http://www.adph.org/administration/fishadv.pdf.

The complete list of advisories follows:

BODY OF WATER / PORTION / TYPE OF ADVISORY/ CONTAMINANT* (see notes at end of table).

Choccolocco Creek

Entire length of Creek from south of Oxford to Logan Martin Lake

Do not consume any fish*

Contaminant - PCBs

Cold Creek Swamp

From confluence of Cold Creek with the Mobile River west through the Swamp

Do not consume any fish*

Contaminant - Mercury

Coosa River

Between Alabama-Georgia State line and Weiss Dam

Limited consumption of catfish over 1 pound**

Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

Between Neely Henry Dam and Riverside

Limited consumption of catfish over 1 pound**

Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

Between Riverside and Logan Martin Dam

Do not consume striped bass, or catfish.

Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

Between Logan Martin Dam and the railroad tracks crossing the Coosa near Vincent

Do not consume striped bass*

Limited consumption of largemouth bass**Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

Lay Lake between Logan Martin Dam and Lay Dam

Do not consume striped bass*

Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

In upper Lay Reservoir approximately two miles downstream of Logan Martin Dam and one half mile downstream from the Kelly Creek - Coosa River Confluence in the vicinity of Ratcliff/Elliott Island.

Limited consumption of spotted bass**

Contaminant - PCBs

Coosa River

In the Croft Ferry area of Neely Henry Reservoir (Alabama Power Reservoir Mile 54). No consumption of channel catfish*

Contaminant - PCBs

Escatawpa River

Entire River

Do not consume largemouth bass or spotted bass

Contaminant - mercury

Fish River

Entire River

Do not consume largemouth bass

Contaminant - Mercury

Fowl River

Entire River

Do not consume largemouth bass*

Contaminant - Mercury

Gulf Coast

Entire coast

Do not consume king mackerel over 39 inches*

Limited consumption of king mackerel under 39 inches**

Contaminant - Mercury

Huntsville Spring Branch & Indian Creek

From Redstone Arsenal to the Tennessee River

Do not consume channel catfish, smallmouth or bigmouth buffalo, brown bullhead, or white bass*

Contaminant - DDT

Styx River

Entire River

Do not consume largemouth bass

Limited consumption of channel catfish

Contaminant - Mercury

Tensaw River

Entire River

Limited Consumption of largemouth bass

Contaminant- Mercury

Tombigbee River

Olin Basin at river mile 60.5

Do not consume largemouth bass and channel catfish*

Contaminant - Mercury, DDT

* Everyone should avoid eating the species of fish listed in the defined area.

** A limited consumption advisory states that women of reproductive age and children less than 15 years old should avoid eating certain fish from these areas. Other people should limit their consumption of the particular species to one meal per month.

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