



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Seafood quality in inshore waters after Hurricane Katrina

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The environmental and health officials of the states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana agree that there is currently no need for additional advisories concerning the quality of seafood in the Hurricane Katrina-affected area, which includes the coastal waters and estuaries from New Orleans, La., to Gulf Shores, Ala., including Lake Ponchartrain, Mississippi Sound and Mobile Bay. Existing state and federal fish consumption advisories issued prior to Hurricane Katrina remain in effect.

Recent sampling of flood waters from these estuaries shows no levels of toxic chemicals that would warrant additional fish consumption advisories. However, comprehensive seafood testing will be conducted to confirm the safety of seafood caught in the affected areas. Sampling plans will be developed cooperatively among state and federal agencies. Seafood sampling will be implemented within two weeks and will include long-term monitoring for one to three years.

High bacteria levels have been noted in flood waters to Lake Ponchartrain, and areas of bacteria contamination can be expected throughout the affected states' estuaries following any significant rainfall event. However, health officials advise that proper handling and thoroughly cooking seafood diminishes risks associated with bacteria in ambient waters below levels of concern.

Consuming raw seafood always poses a potential health risk due to the possibility of bacterial contamination.

Additional common sense advice to consumers is to:

- avoid seafood caught in areas with visible oil sheens or slicks,
- do not eat fish that are dead or dying as a result of a fish kill,
- do not eat fish or seafood if it has an unusual odor or taste, and
- as always, use proper hygiene when handling and preparing seafood for consumption.

Also, State health officials emphasize that following these simple guidelines is appropriate when preparing fish and seafood at anytime, not only after a storm event. These guidelines include keeping seafood cold until ready to cook, thoroughly cooking seafood, eating only finfish fillets and avoid eating the skin, organs or fatty tissue (belly flap). Additionally, broiling, grilling or poaching fish are recommended healthy, low-fat methods of cooking.

For more information contact the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (1-888-293-7020), the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (Kathleen Golden or Robbie Wilbur, 601-961-5277) , or the Alabama Department of Public Health (Dr. Neil Sass, 1-800-201-8208).

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