



## **DEC News Release**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **KACHEMAK BAY EAST CLOSED TO MUSSEL HARVEST**

#### **Closure due to paralytic shellfish poison**

**August 8, 2003**--A commercial shellfish harvesting area in Kachemak Bay, known as "Kachemak Bay East" was closed today to commercial mussel harvesting by the Department of Environmental Conservation because of high levels of paralytic shellfish poison (PSP) found in a sample from the area.

According to Mike Ostasz, DEC's shellfish program manager, individuals are advised not to harvest or eat mussels from this area because of the unacceptable level of PSP.

Officials designated the area as east and south of a line in Kachemak Bay starting at the mouth of Martin River, extending to the northwest tip of Chugachik, Island and then southwest to Barabara Point. The area is closed to the commercial harvest and sale of mussels, but not other shellfish. The only allowable commercial harvest and sale of mussels will be from companies that submit mussel samples for PSP lot sampling analysis, and hold product pending satisfactory lab analysis.

PSP comes from algae, a food source for filter feeding shellfish such as clams, oysters and mussels. Toxin from the algae is stored in shellfish tissue. The toxin can be present even when there is no visible coloration, or so-called red tides in the ocean water. Presently, there is no accurate home test to determine the presence of PSP outside the laboratory.

Ostasz said that a mussel sample taken from the Kachemak Bay East area revealed a level of 168 micrograms of toxin per 100 grams of tissue. The national public health standard for PSP is 80 microgram per 100 grams of tissue. Although this area normally has low levels of PSP increases in toxicity have previously occurred in mid August.

Ostasz said the DEC is keeping the area closed for mussels and requiring at least three samples over a fourteen-day period before it will consider reopening the area. All

samples must show PSP levels below the 80 microgram per 100 gram standard before the area is reopened. During this time, other shellfish species will also be carefully monitored. "Mussels are early warning indicators of the presence of PSP, so we will want to monitor other shellfish species during this time as well," he said.

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