



Commissioner Ernesta Ballard

State of Alaska Departments of Environmental Conservation and Health & Social Services



Commissioner Joel Gilbertson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 31, 2004

Good News: More evidence that Alaska fish are healthy to eat

Juneau, Alaska ---Latest results from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Fish Monitoring Program show low levels of persistent organic pollutants (PCBs, dioxins, organochlorine pesticides) in Alaska fish. The results reinforce earlier findings that Alaska's fish are among the safest in the nation for consumption. The full report, entitled Analysis of Organic Contaminants in Alaskan Fish, can be found at www.state.ak.us/dec/eh/vet/FMP2.htm.

"People are concerned that food sources are being contaminated by persistent organic pollutants, which have been found in foods around the globe. We do not know what levels are in other types of food, but we do know what's in our fish. The importance of these results cannot be overstated," said DEC Commissioner Ernesta Ballard. "Alaska's natural resources provide a rich bounty of healthy foods for residents and the rest of the world. Levels in Alaska fish are below those measured in fish from other parts of the world. People have good reason to continue to enjoy a diet rich in Alaska seafood."

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Epidemiology Section of the Division of Public Health reviewed the initial results and concluded that contaminant concentrations in fish from Alaska waters are low, and the benefits of Alaska fish consumption far outweigh any slight risks. "These results add to the significant body of evidence regarding contaminants in Alaska's wildlife and people. We continue to recommend the unrestricted consumption of fish from Alaska waters. Fish are a very nutritious protein source that is low in saturated fat and provides essential fatty acids, antioxidants and vitamins," said Public Health Director Richard Mandsager, M.D.

DEC's Fish Monitoring Program is a collaborative effort with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the International Pacific Halibut Commission, and Alaska subsistence users and commercial fishermen to collect and test fish for certain environmental contaminants. During the first two years of the project, DEC analyzed 520 samples of a variety of fish for heavy metals, primarily from marine waters. This report presents persistent organic pollutants data from 89 fish samples (18 chum, 17 Chinook, 24 sockeye, 11 halibut, 8 sheefish and 11 sablefish).

The program, initiated in 2001 is ongoing. DEC along with other research partners continued sampling in 2004 to collect more information regarding the health of Alaska's fish. DEC continues to evaluate fish for heavy metals including mercury, the persistent organic pollutants mentioned, and other chemicals recently recognized as being persistent and bioaccumulative, such as fire retardants.

-MORE-

2// Good News: More evidence that Alaska fish are good to eat . . .

“We recognize that fish are an important and essential part of the Alaskan diet. Alaskans, especially those living in rural areas, eat much more wild food than people in other parts of the United States. For Native Alaskans, harvesting local food is an integral part of their culture and economy,” said Ballard. “We want to give Alaskans as much information as possible to help them make wise and healthy dietary choices.”

-###-

Contacts: Bob Gerlach, Division of Environmental Health, DEC, (907) 269-7635
Kerre Fisher, Information Officer, HSS, (907) 269-2042
Sherry Hill, Information Officer, HSS, (907) 465-1618