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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

No. 12-10

March 13, 2012

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DEC to Begin Recreational Shellfish Beach Monitoring Pilot Program

(JUNEAU, AK) – The Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Environmental Health is beginning a four-year recreational shellfish beach monitoring pilot program. The Division of Environmental Health will partner with three coastal communities to test recreationally harvested shellfish for Paralytic Shellfish Toxins (PST). These toxins can cause Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) which can result in death in humans in as little as two hours after consumption.

Participating communities will collect samples, publicize test results, and provide community outreach to shellfish harvesters. The Division of Environmental Health will pay for sample shipping and testing costs. One community will be selected from Southeast, one from Southcentral, and another from Southwest Alaska. Tribal, municipal and borough governments were notified earlier this week of the opportunity to apply, by April 6, 2012, to participate in the program.

Filter-feeding shellfish like clams, mussels, oysters, geoducks and scallops ingest algae and store toxins in their edible body tissue. PST is most commonly associated with "red tides," but the toxin can be present even when there is no visible discoloration in the ocean water. PSP can occur when humans ingest shellfish with high concentrations of the toxins. PST cannot be cooked or cleaned out of shellfish. Currently, commercially grown shellfish is tested and considered safe.

More information on Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning can be found at:
<http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/RecShell/index.html>.

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