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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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## **DEC Advises Caution in Harvesting Shellfish** *No "safe" months for recreational harvesting*

(JUNEAU, AK) – The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) confirms the closure of commercial shellfish harvesting on the east side of Kachemak Bay. DEC's Environmental Health Lab confirmed Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) levels above the regulatory limit of 80 µg. These elevated PSP levels were detected from blue mussel and oyster samples collected from an oyster farm on September 13 from Halibut Cove.

Shellfish gatherers should be cautious of the dangers of Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) from clams and mussels gathered on beaches across Alaska. There are **NO** beaches that are certified or designated as "safe" beaches for shellfish harvesting in Alaska. All recreationally-harvested shellfish – including clams, mussels, oysters, geoducks, and scallops – may contain paralytic shellfish toxin (PST) that, if ingested, can cause death. **PSP cannot be cooked, cleaned, or frozen out of shellfish.**

If you choose to harvest shellfish in Alaska, it is important that you know the facts about PST, know the species you plan to harvest, and know the symptoms of paralytic shellfish poisoning so you can seek help quickly.

PSP comes from algae, a food source for filter-feeding shellfish, like clams and mussels. The shellfish store the toxin from the algae in their tissues. The toxin can be present even when there is no visible discoloration or so-called red tides in the ocean water, and there is no discoloration of the shellfish.

Symptoms of PSP may appear in less than an hour after ingestion. Initial symptoms are a tingling or numbness in the lips and tongue, often followed by tingling and numbness in the fingertips and toes. These symptoms may progress to loss of muscle coordination, dizziness, weakness, drowsiness, and incoherence. The only treatment for severe cases is the use of a

mechanical respirator and oxygen. If symptoms are exhibited, call 911, or get to a medical facility immediately.

For more information on shellfish harvesting and PSP, go to:

[http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/seafood/rec\\_shellfish\\_harvest.html](http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/seafood/rec_shellfish_harvest.html)

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/chronic/documents/02-internal/paralyticshellfishpoisoningfactsheet.pdf>

[http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/marine\\_toxins/](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/marine_toxins/)

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