

FACT SHEET

M/V Selendang Ayu Oil Spill

Subsistence Foods Consumption Safety

BACKGROUND

On December 8, 2004, the M/V Selendang Ayu ran aground and broke apart near Unalaska Island between Skan Bay and Spray Cape approximately 25 air miles southwest of Dutch Harbor. An estimated 321,000 gallons of intermediate fuel oil and 14,680 gallons of marine diesel and miscellaneous oils were released to the environment. In addition, the vessel contained approximately 60,000 tons of soybeans. Samples of subsistence resources were collected in the summer of 2005 to assess the level of petroleum contaminants and to determine if consuming these resources presented potential health risks. Black chitons, blue mussels, green sea urchin roe, pink salmon, pacific cod, and a harbor seal were collected and analyzed for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), a class of chemicals that reflect petroleum contamination.

SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED ABOUT PETROLEUM IN SHELLFISH AND OTHER SUBSISTENCE RESOURCES?

PAHs detected in mussels and other sampled subsistence resources in Unalaska Bay and near the Selendang Ayu spill area are not present at levels of concern for human health. PAH contamination of shellfish is of minimal risk to human health if the shellfish are harvested from areas with no signs of oil on the surface or subsurface of water and sediments. The data interpretation is based on, and consistent with, research conducted under the auspices of the Alaska Oil Spill Health Task Force, which was established in the wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989.

Use the following guidelines, traditional knowledge, and common sense to avoid animals that are oiled or ones that don't metabolize oil quickly. (If animals don't metabolize oil quickly, it stays in their bodies for a long time).

- To avoid any potential health risk, harvesting and consumption should be avoided where oil and/or sheens can be seen or smelled on the surface or subsurface sediments or water.
- As the elders teach us, don't collect or eat subsistence food animals that are behaving oddly or have unusual lesions.
- Shellfish, like mussels, don't metabolize oil very quickly, so it stays in their bodies a long time. Also, they are most likely to be re-exposed from oil trapped in sediments. Avoid harvesting these animals from oiled beaches, or if you see or smell oil on the animals.

- We know less about how quickly other intertidal organisms like chitons, limpets, and octopus metabolize oil. However, they are also likely to be re-exposed to oil from oil trapped in sediments. Avoid harvesting these animals from oiled beaches, and don't eat them if you see or smell oil on the animals.
- Finfish, like salmon, rapidly metabolize oil. If they survive being exposed to oil, it is processed very quickly through their bodies. If fish do not have oil on them and otherwise appear healthy, there is very low risk to you from eating them.
- Birds and mammals also rapidly metabolize oil. Check carefully for oiled feathers, feet, or fur. If the birds and mammals do not appear to be oiled and otherwise appear healthy, there is very low risk to you from eating them. If you're still concerned, avoid eating organ meats, especially the liver.

Additional sampling of mussels will be conducted near the M/V Selendang Ayu spill site this summer to determine if PAH levels in mussels are changing over time.

YOU SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT PSP!

Due to paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), there is currently an on-going advisory in the state against the gathering and consumption of shellfish except at approved beaches.

There are no approved beaches in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor area. Two samples collected last summer from Skan Bay contained PSP toxin at concentrations above the allowable level for commercial sale. The health hazard from PSP is much more serious than any health hazards associated with petroleum contaminants at the levels currently found in the shellfish.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Department of Health and Social Services and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. March 22, 2006. For more information please contact Scott Arnold, Ph.D. (Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health) at 907-269-8086 or Angela Matz, Ph.D. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) at 907-456-0442.