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Mar-Gun wreck spill did not impact subsistence resources

Foods tested for contaminants; show no level of concern

Mussels and other subsistence resources near the Mar-Gun wreck site do not show high levels of petroleum contamination, according to state officials.

The fishing vessel Mar-Gun grounded near St. George Island March 5. Responders removed about 18,371 gallons of mixed oils. An unknown amount of diesel fuel spilled into the water and onto the beach.

Samples of subsistence resources in the region were collected in late spring to assess their level of petroleum contaminants and to determine if they posed a health risk. "With many people relying on local seafood as an important food source, we are pleased results of the sampling show these resources are not affected by the spill," said Gary Folley, central area response team manager for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

DEC, in conjunction with the St. George Traditional Council, oversaw the sampling program. Polaris Applied Sciences Inc. developed it. The Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, conducted the public health interpretation of the analytical results.

Tissue samples were collected from limpets, mussels and sea urchins and analyzed for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (petroleum contaminants). Test results showed minimal levels of contamination. The Alaska Division of Public Health will issue a health evaluation report on subsistence resources in the area.

Subsistence harvesters should always be aware of the dangers of paralytic shellfish poison (PSP), which is a serious health hazard. Due to PSP concerns, there is an on-going advisory in the state against the gathering and consumption of shellfish except at approved beaches. There are no approved beaches on St. George Island.

