

HUMAN HEALTH CRITERIA IN ALASKA WATER QUALITY STANDARDS



Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND

Human health criteria, authorized at 18 AAC 70.020(11), are numeric values in water quality standards for toxic substances (e.g., metals, pesticides). These values are established to allow Alaskans to consume fish and shellfish and to use state waters for drinking water supply over the course of a lifetime without adverse health effects.

Alaska's current exposure factors are outdated and require rulemaking to update the criteria used by DEC water pollution control programs.

DEC has identified updates to human health criteria as a high priority for the 2018-2020 Triennial Review cycle. DEC is working to develop a rulemaking that addresses Alaska's unique characteristics.

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DEC Triennial Review
Website:

<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/water/wqsar/trireview/index.htm>

Why Is DEC interested in this issue?

- Water quality standards should be protective of human health
- Alaskans consume a lot of fish
- Revisions to the existing criteria need to be legally and scientifically defensible
- This is an important issue to many Alaskans

How do we come up with revised human health criteria?

Determination of human health criteria involves use of a comprehensive risk assessment approach that considers the acceptable degree of risk, degree of toxicity, duration and exposure factors (such as water and fish consumption rates), and accuracy of data. Application of different variables present in the human health criteria formula will require technical and policy decisions to be made. EPA water quality guidance provides methods for fish consumption rates and other factors in the human health criteria formula to be adjusted higher or lower than national criteria based on state or site specific information.



Key Points to Consider

- **The consumption of fish and shellfish from Alaskan waters is a safe and healthy practice.** Alaska has very good information on potential points of concern and addresses them through fish tissue monitoring and Fish Consumption Advisories issued by the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

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- Alaska's water quality standards are based on extensive research and considered to be protective of human health. Alaska currently has tools available to adjust human health criteria and fish consumption rates to address local concerns.
- Taking the time to collect information, evaluate that information, hear from stakeholders, and determine what actions are most appropriate will lead to better results.

What is DEC doing now?

DEC recognizes the importance of this issue and the challenges that may accompany it. In an effort to be mindful in choosing an approach that is appropriate for Alaska, DEC has done or is doing the following:

- a. Developed a Technical Workgroup Report that summarizes issues discussed and the recommendations of the workgroup. The report is expected to be completed in 2018.
- b. Determining how the findings of the DEC Human Health Criteria Technical Workgroup will be applied in the DEC decision making process;
- c. Considering what new regulations and implementation tools may be required;
- d. Reviewing the efforts by other states when addressing human health criteria, and the successes or failures of those approaches in order to inform Alaska's long-term approach.