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Press Release

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No Fukushima-Related Radiation Detected in Alaska Seafood *Sampling Partnership Receives FDA Award*

(JUNEAU, AK) – Following the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, there have been public concerns about potential impacts on Alaska seafood from the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Although modeling and other analyses have not demonstrated a potential risk to Alaska fish, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Division of Environmental Health (DEH) has been coordinating with the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Division of Public Health, as well as other state, federal, and international agencies and organizations to address continued public concerns.

Through these efforts, DEC was able to partner with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to have Alaska fish sampled and tested for Fukushima-related radionuclides and report test results to the public. The testing in 2015 continues to confirm that the quality of Alaska seafood has not been impacted, with all tests showing “non-detect” for radionuclides associated with the Fukushima nuclear disaster.

DEC’s Fish Monitoring Program and Food Safety and Sanitation Program developed a plan to collect and test representative samples of Alaska fish species that spend part of their life cycle in the western Pacific Ocean and are important to subsistence, sport, and commercial fisheries. These species included: king (Chinook) salmon, chum (dog) salmon, sockeye (red) salmon, pink salmon (humpies), halibut, pollock, sablefish, and Pacific cod. DEC Environmental Health Officers around the state collected the samples during their regular inspections of commercial fishing processors. Fish samples were collected using FDA statistical protocols and were then shipped to the FDA’s Winchester Engineering Analytical Center for laboratory analysis.

The results of testing conducted on Alaska fish in 2014, and previously reported by DEC, showed no detection of Fukushima-related radionuclides

Iodine-131 (I-131), Cesium-134 (Cs-134), and Cesium-137 (Cs-137). Because scientists were predicting the concentrations of radionuclides in North Pacific waters could peak in 2015, DEC continued the sampling program this summer. Samples in 2015 were again analyzed for Fukushima-related radionuclides and, as in the previous year, had no detectable levels of Fukushima-related radionuclides. These data, along with modeling and monitoring data from multiple agencies and organizations, continue to show fish from Alaska waters are safe from radionuclides related to the nuclear reactor damage in Japan.

Water quality data from a crowd-funded project spearheaded by the non-profit Cook Inletkeeper also appears to support this conclusion. In 2014, they tested waters in Lower Cook Inlet for radiation, and the results reported were also non-detect for Fukushima-related radiation. Scientists at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution have also tested along the Pacific West Coast and found no levels of concern.

The collaborative effort of the Alaska Fish Radiation Radionuclide Sampling Partnership has resulted in a national group recognition award in 2015 from the FDA. The award, which included DEC and DHSS staff, recognized exemplary service to the State of Alaska in providing sampling techniques and quality control measures for fish. Their work not only alleviated the public's concern over a primary food source in Alaska, but also strengthened the reputation of Alaska's commercial fisheries as one of the most wholesome food sources on the planet.

According to DEC Commissioner Larry Hartig, "The State's ability to point to lab analyses in confirming the health of Alaska's fisheries is important to consumers in Alaska and to the national and international markets for our seafood. These analyses can also alert us to new sources of contamination. One of our goals at DEC is to sustain a collaborative Fish Monitoring Program that helps meet these needs."

For a full listing of the 2015 FDA radionuclide testing results for Alaska, please see: <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/Radiation/Docs/November%2016%202015%20Radiation%20Not%20Detected%20in%20Fish%20Charts.pdf>

For more Alaska-specific information about Fukushima-related radiation exposure, visit DHSS's website: <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/eh/radiation/default.htm>.

For more detailed information on the analyses, visit DEC's website: <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/Radiation/index.html>.

For more information about other testing DEC performs on Alaska fish, please see: <https://dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/fish.htm>.