



Bill Richardson
Governor

**NEW MEXICO
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT**

Office of the Secretary

Harold Runnels Building
1190 Saint Francis Drive (87505)
PO Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502
Phone (505) 827-2855 Fax (505) 827-2836
www.nmenv.state.nm.us



Ron Curry
Secretary
Jon Goldstein
Deputy Secretary

March 20, 2009
For Immediate Release

Contact: Marissa Stone, NMED Communication Director
Telephone: (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475

**State Agencies Issue Advisories for the Consumption of Fish from New Mexico's Lakes,
Rivers and Streams**

Residents Should Eat Fish According to Advisory Guidelines

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The New Mexico Environment Department, the state Department of Game and Fish and the state Department of Health are issuing new advisories detailing the safe consumption of fish from the state's rivers, streams and lakes. The advisories are based on fish tissue samples collected from bodies of water across New Mexico.

Fish are nutritious and can be an important part of a healthy diet but some fish may contain contaminants at levels that could lead to health problems if consumed over a long period of time.

"Now that the weather is heating up, fishing is a fun way to enjoy our natural environment. However, we have a duty to monitor and to provide information to anglers on contaminant levels in our state's fish," said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. "There is no health threat from catch and release fishing, swimming, boating, or camping at waters that have fish consumption advisories. We encourage those recreational activities."

"If New Mexicans follow the guidelines, they should be able to enjoy regular meals of fish caught in New Mexico waters," said Todd Stevenson, Director of the Department of Game and Fish. "There are only a few locations where fish appear to be contaminated to the level they should not be eaten at all."

"Recreation and fishing conditions at state parks are going to be great in 2009," said State Parks Director Dave Simon. "Like any activity, visitors should think safety as they are having fun and these advisories provide a guideline to safely consuming the fish they catch."

The advisory (attached) lists contaminants – mercury, DDT and PCBs – found in different species of fish of varying size classes at various waters and offers recommendations on the maximum number of eight ounce meals eaten in a month. NMED's data indicate other contaminants are at low enough levels that consumption of the fish is safe and do not require a health advisory.

Fish tissue data show that larger fish contain more contaminants because they are older, have been in the water longer, and have absorbed more contaminants. Those advisories, however, do not change the state's regulations on the size or numbers of fish anglers are allowed to keep.

The state periodically collects fish from bodies of water across New Mexico and analyzes those fish for contaminants. Based on the results of those analyses, the Environment Department developed recommendations for fish consumption. Those recommendations are based on guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The new advisories replace all previously issued ones.

NMED's Department of Energy Oversight Bureau and Surface Water Quality Bureau used their own data and some from Los Alamos National Laboratory's fish tissue samples to make their recommendations. Fish or bodies of water not listed in the advisory indicate data were not available for evaluation at the time the fish consumption advisories were issued.

Mercury, which in fish is in the form of methylmercury, is a toxic metal. Methylmercury is toxic at very low exposure levels. Each person's exposure to methylmercury depends on the quantity in the fish they eat and how often they eat it. If consumed in large quantities over a long period of time, methylmercury damages the brain, nerves, kidneys, and may lead to other health problems such as those of the cardiovascular system. The brains of fetuses, babies, and young children are most at risk as they are still developing.

Eating large quantities of fish with PCBs may cause a variety of health problems, including those related to nerve development, reproduction, hormones, and cancer. The negative effects of PCBs on the development of infants and children whose mothers were exposed before becoming pregnant and during pregnancy are of particular concern. The effects in newborns and children may include a decrease in learning ability that may continue later in life. PCBs may cause cancer in humans, particularly liver and kidney cancer, because they are known to cause cancer in laboratory animals.

Excessive exposure to DDT through eating contaminated fish may cause a variety of health problems, including effects on reproduction, the nervous system, the immune system, and may increase the risk of cancer. DDT and its break down products can mimic the action of natural hormones, potentially affecting pregnancy by increasing the chance of premature babies and reducing a mother's ability to produce milk. DDT may also cause liver and breast cancer in humans because it is known to cause cancer in laboratory animals. Mercury contamination in fish is linked to air pollution from power plants and natural sources of mercury in the environment; PCBs can be traced primarily to the improper disposal and handling of electrical transformers; and DDT is linked to past pesticide application practices. Both PCBs and DDT have been banned from most uses in the United States since the 1970s.

The state has issued fish consumption advisories since the early 1990s. This update is the most comprehensive review and revision of New Mexico fish consumption advisories since the inception of the program. The Environment Department, which has sampled fish tissue for more than a decade, has continued to expand its program over the years to provide the most up-to-date information for anglers and residents.

The consumption advisories are included in the 2009-10 Fishing Rules and Information Booklet now being distributed by the Department of Game and Fish to vendors across the state. The 2009 Fishing RIB also will be posted on the Game and Fish Web site at www.wildlife.state.nm.us.

For more information, call Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director at (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475.

