



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

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NEW JERSEY UPDATES FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORIES FOR LOWER DELAWARE RIVER WATERSHED, EXPANDS TESTING TO INCLUDE PFAS

(18/P63) TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Health, has updated recreational fish advisories for tributaries, lakes and ponds in the lower Delaware River watershed as part of the state’s ongoing fish-safety monitoring program.

The DEP has also expanded testing of fish in selected water bodies in this and other regions of the state to include several chemicals of emerging concern known as perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS. These analyses have resulted in the DEP’s first consumption advisories for these chemicals.

“Before going fishing, anglers should take a few minutes to review advisories in place for their favorite fishing spots so they can make good decisions about eating the fish they catch,” said DEP Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe.



The DEP tested 11 fish species in 14 water bodies in Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean and Salem counties for PCBs, mercury and pesticides. The testing resulted in less restrictive advisories for 36 species than had been in place, while 24 saw no change. Ten advisories are now more restrictive.

Data also was collected for species not tested in previous years as well as at one new sample location. The new data resulted in 30 new consumption advisories for the lower Delaware River watershed region.

Due to growing concerns over the presence of PFAS in the environment, the DEP also sampled water, sediment and fish tissue samples from a limited number of water bodies in the lower Delaware River watershed and other regions of the state.

Water bodies were selected based on their proximity to potential sources of PFAS and their likelihood of being used for recreational and fishing purposes. PFAS were detected at varying levels and combinations in all of the water bodies tested.

PFAS – which include compounds more commonly known as PFOA, PFOS and PFNA – were once widely used in a variety of applications, including non-stick cookware, stain-resistant clothing and fabrics, food packaging, and in firefighting foams. These chemicals are persistent in the environment and can accumulate in people exposed to them.

Water bodies tested included the Passaic River in Passaic County, the Raritan River in Bergen and Passaic counties, the Metedeconk River in Ocean County, several lakes adjacent to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Burlington and Ocean counties, the North Branch of Rancocas Creek in Burlington County, Woodbury Creek in Gloucester County, Fenwick Creek in Salem County and the Cohansey River in Cumberland County.

“The DEP will continue to assess other water bodies for these chemicals and will integrate results and recommendations into the routine consumption advisories that we update regularly,” said Gary Buchanan, Director of the DEP’s Division of Science, Research and Environmental Health.

All states have fish consumption advisories. Many of the fish on New Jersey’s advisory lists are typically caught and released without being consumed, but some people rely on some of the species on the advisory lists as a food source.

“Fishing provides enjoyable and relaxing recreation, and we know many people enjoy cooking and eating their own catch,” New Jersey Health Commissioner Dr. Shereef Elnahal said. “However, certain fish may contain contaminants and pose serious health risks like cancer and nervous system issues. It is a good idea to follow these advisories when consuming recreationally caught fish and crabs, particularly if you eat them often.”

The DEP and Department of Health advise all anglers to get the latest advisories for the specific water body they fish by visiting www.fishsmarteatsmartnj.org or by clicking the banner above.

The fish consumption advisory revisions for the lower Delaware River watershed follow an update issued in February for waters of the Delaware River and Delaware Bay shared by New Jersey and Delaware. The update, reflecting improving ecological conditions in the estuary, removed all advisories for weakfish and easing of advisories for bluefish.

As part of the lower Delaware River watershed update, fish were sampled from the following bodies of water: Big Timber Creek, along the border of Camden and Gloucester counties; Cooper River Lake, Kirkwood Lake, Newton Lake and Pennsauken Creek in Camden County; Mantua Creek, Stewart Lake and Wilson Lake in Gloucester County; DOD Ponds in Salem County; Rancocas Creek and Strawbridge Lake in Burlington County; the Maurice River and Union Lake in Cumberland County; and Prospertown Lake in Ocean County.

The DEP tested fish tissue for mercury, organochlorinated pesticides and PCBs, with the fish species that were sampled varying depending on location. Fish species sampled were largemouth bass, bluegill sunfish, common carp, white perch, channel catfish, pumpkinseed, striped bass, chain pickerel, yellow bullhead, brown bullhead and white catfish.

As is typical, the latest sampling found the highest mercury concentrations in species at the top of the food chain, such as chain pickerel and largemouth bass, while the highest PCB concentrations were found in bottom feeders, such as channel catfish and common carp. PCBs were generally detected at relatively low levels. Pesticides were found at only very low levels.

While water quality in New Jersey continues to improve, past pollution can persist for many years in sediments and continue to accumulate in fish at or near the top of the aquatic food chain.

Fish are an excellent source of protein, minerals and vitamins, and help maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet. The American Heart Association recommends that people eat fish regularly. Fish are also one of the few foods that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids needed for proper development of the brain and nervous system in the fetus and infants, and may reduce the risk of heart attack.

But due to past use of PCBs and pesticides as well as deposition of mercury from various sources, some recreationally caught fish can be unhealthy for children or some adults with certain health concerns.

The DEP and Department of Health have been issuing fish consumption advisories since 1983, updating them on a regular basis. Advisories include statewide, regional and water body specific advice as well as a general advisory for freshwater fish. These advisories allow the public to make informed choices about the fish they catch and eat.

The state's ongoing public outreach activities include responding to online and telephone inquiries from the public, as well as distribution of outreach materials to all New Jersey Women, Infants and Children centers in English and Spanish. Information is also sent to recreational anglers, local and county health departments, and other stakeholders.

For much of the population, advisories can range from no restrictions to a recommendation to limit consumption to one meal per week. For the high-risk population – which includes pregnant women, women planning to become pregnant, nursing mothers, infants and children – advisories can range from no more than one meal per week to do not eat.

If you choose to eat those species under advisories, there are steps you can take to reduce your exposure.

Proper cleaning and cooking techniques, which remove some of the fat from the fish, can significantly reduce levels of PCBs and organic chemicals. However, these techniques will not reduce or remove unsafe levels of mercury from fish.

For all freshwater fish and waters not covered by consumption advisories, consumers should follow the DEP's general freshwater advisories, which recommend eating no more than one meal

per week for the general population and no more than one meal a month for high-risk individuals.

For the DEP's PFAS study report, visit www.nj.gov/dep/dsr/

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