



news release

From The Texas Department of Health
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TDH Recommends Limiting Consumption of Fish from Some East Texas Waters

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) today issued an advisory warning people not to eat more than two eight-ounce servings per month of certain fish taken from Caddo Lake, Big Cypress Creek and the Sam Rayburn, Toledo Bend and B.A. Steinhagen reservoirs in East Texas. Children should not eat more than two four-ounce servings per month.

The advisory, issued after elevated levels of mercury were found in certain species of fish, applies to the consumption of largemouth bass and freshwater drum from any of the specified lakes or waterways. These monthly consumption limits also should include no more than one eight-ounce serving for adults, or one four-ounce serving for children, of white bass or white/striped hybrid bass from the Steinhagen Reservoir.

Dr. David Smith, Texas Commissioner of Health, said, "I want to emphasize that this advisory is a preventive measure. It does not mean that anyone who occasionally eats more fish than recommended will definitely suffer adverse health effects. We are concerned primarily with those most at risk: children and pregnant women."

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that can be toxic when consumed by humans. It gets into the air and water as a result of the natural weathering of the earth's crust and from the burning of garbage and fuels and from emissions from factories that use mercury.

A specific source of mercury in the fish from the East Texas waters is unknown, but high mercury levels also have been found in fish from waters in several southeastern states. Typically, these waters are located in areas marked by a high acidity of water and soil and by plentiful plant life.

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Continual ingestion of methyl mercury, the mercury compound found in the fish, can harm the human brain and nervous system of adults and children. Young children are especially at risk, and the brain and nervous system in a developing fetus can be permanently damaged if the mother eats foods containing elevated levels of mercury during pregnancy.

Officials said the mercury content in the East Texas waters is negligible and that the elevated levels in the fish are the result of accumulation along the food chain. There is no risk of mercury contamination from fishing, skiing, boating, swimming and other recreational activities in the East Texas waters. There is no concern about mercury contaminating public water systems which use the lakes or reservoirs as a source.

Catfish, bream, perch, crappie, carp and other species of fish not included in the advisory are considered safe for consumption.

TDH, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission will continue to investigate.

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(For more information, contact Kirk Wiles, Seafood Safety Division, at 512-719-0215, or Doug McBride, Public Information Officer, at 512-458-7400.)