TDH news release

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TDH Study Shows Fish, Crabs from Most of Galveston Bay Safe to Eat

Results of a comprehensive multi-year Texas Department of Health (TDH) study of seafood from Galveston Bay and adjacent waters show that fish and crabs from areas of the bay where most recreational fishing occurs are safe for unlimited consumption.

"All species of fish and crabs from areas of Galveston Bay south of a line from Red Bluff Point to Five Mile Cut Marker to Houston Point can be eaten without restrictions," said Kirk Wiles, director of TDH's seafood safety division. "This safe area covers the vast majority of Galveston Bay including the areas where most all recreational fishing occurs."

But the study results also prompted TDH to expand on a 1990 advisory that limited consumption of catfish and crabs from the upper part of the Houston Ship Channel and the southern part of the San Jacinto River. TDH now recommends limited consumption of all fish and crabs from those two areas.

TDH recommendations and actions include the following.

•Due to elevated levels of chlorinated pesticides, PCBs and dioxins, TDH advises that adults eat no more than one eight-ounce serving per month of any species of fish or crabs from the Houston Ship Channel northwest of the Lynchburg Ferry Crossing or from the San Jacinto River below the U.S. Highway 90 bridge.

Children and women who are pregnant, nursing or who may become pregnant should not eat any fish or crabs from these waters.

•Because of elevated dioxin levels, TDH recommends these same consumption limits of catfish and crabs from bay waters south of the Lynchburg Ferry Crossing to the Red Bluff Point to Five Mile Cut Marker to Houston Point line.

•TDH has lifted a 1993 consumption advisory on all fish and crabs from Clear Creek, which flows into Clear Lake, part of the Galveston Bay complex. The latest TDH study found no harmful levels of dichloroethane and trichloroethane, chemicals that prompted the 1993 advisory.

The $600,000 TDH study began in 1998 and included testing fish and crabs from all areas of Galveston Bay and adjacent waters. Most of the laboratory work was done by TDH's laboratory in Austin. The study was funded by the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Study data, maps, public health risk assessments and consumption advisories are available on the estuary program's Web site: http://gbep.tamug.tamu.edu.

The study did not include oysters, which are continuously monitored in another TDH seafood safety program, or shrimp, which are not considered a source of harmful chemicals.

Frequent and long-term consumption of fish with elevated levels of chlorinated pesticides, dioxins and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) may cause reproductive defects, cancer or liver damage. Frequent and long-term consumption of fish with elevated levels of dichloroethane and trichloroethane may cause cancer.

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(News media: for more information contact Kirk Wiles, Director, TDH Seafood Safety Division, at 512-719-0215; or Doug McBride, TDH Public Information Officer, at 512-457-7400.)

TDH Web Site: www.tdh.state.tx.us