



# MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Fellow Marylanders:

For many Marylanders, spring and summer fishing is an annual tradition. On any given day in warmer seasons, people fish from Maryland piers and boats for fun and food.

This month's issue of *EnviroMatters* – MDE's hot topics monthly e-pub – focuses on Maryland's fish consumption guidelines. PCBs and mercury accumulate in fish tissue and when levels are too high, they can impact public health. This is why MDE works to educate people on how they can safely eat fish. By following those guidelines, we can look forward to a long and fun summer of enjoying seafood.

*EnviroMatters* covers this agency's position on issues of policy, professional recognition, and initiatives to protect and enhance public health, our environment and the Chesapeake Bay. As always, your comments and ideas are welcome.

Sincerely yours,

Shari T. Wilson  
Secretary



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# ENVIROMATTERS

May 16, 2007

## Fish Consumption Advisories: Providing Information to Make Responsible Decisions

Fish is a fresh food staple for many Maryland families and a great source of protein. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is the agency responsible for testing recreationally caught fish around the state and determining where they are safe to eat. While MDE has no authority to prohibit catching or consuming contaminated fish, following fish consumption guidelines will protect public health.

### Brain Food

Eating fish is beneficial and an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. This fact holds particularly true for women and growing children. Fish are rich in protein, low in fat, and high in good omega fatty acids. National regulatory agencies and health organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend that women who are pregnant eat two average meals, or up to 12 ounces per week, of fish that are typically low in contaminants.

### Mercury and PCBs

When people eat fish, they are exposed to certain contaminants that accumulate in fish tissue, such as mercury and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). In sufficient quantities, these contaminants can impact health. Mercury can affect nerve development and lead to learning and mental deficits. PCBs can have a similar effect and are also suspected carcinogens.

### No Bones About It

By all means, eat fish! Commercially caught and prepared fish - the kind you buy in the store - meets federal regulatory standards for quality. When it comes to fish you catch yourself, MDE recommends that you be aware of the species and the locations with the highest contamination concentrations. Eat fish from those areas less frequently, eat smaller fish, and avoid the larger

predatory species. The popular rockfish, or striped bass, for example, should be eaten only once each month. White perch from the Eastern Shore and yellow perch from fresh waters of Maryland can be eaten twice per week.

### Education Is Key

States are responsible for informing their citizens about contaminants in recreationally caught fish. The federal government (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) only advises and regulates commercially sold fish.

MDE recognizes the critical role that education and public information must play in this public health issue. MDE partners with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to reach out to women and children through the state's network of Women, Infants and Children (WIC) clinics. MDE distributes user-friendly, informative brochures to targeted sensitive populations. Brochures are posted on MDE's website and available to anyone who requests them. MDE also posts signs in Spanish or English reminding people of the advisories at sites where contamination is most serious.

### Guidelines for Recreationally Caught Fish Species in Maryland

For more information, visit our website at [www.mde.state.md.us/CitizensInfoCenter/FishandShellfish/home/index.asp](http://www.mde.state.md.us/CitizensInfoCenter/FishandShellfish/home/index.asp).

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