



IOWA CHAPTER

Fish Consumption Advisories

Once toxic pollutants, such as PCBs and mercury, enter water bodies, fish can accumulate them in their body tissues. Fish accumulate toxins in their tissues when their gills are exposed to contaminated water, when they ingest plants that have become contaminated, and when they eat smaller fish that have become contaminated. Eating those fish exposes people to those contaminants.

Every year the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) tests fish in a number of Iowa's rivers and lakes for pollutants. If the tests show contamination above a safe threshold, then the DNR issues a fish consumption advisory. The advisory identifies the amount of fish that can be eaten per week and the type of fish.¹



Photo credit: Lynn Betts, USDA NRCS

The DNR issues press releases about the advisory. Additionally the advisory is listed in the fishing regulations that are distributed to people who purchase fishing licenses; those regulations are also posted on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources website. No signs are posted along the water body to notify people of the advisory. The DNR continues to encourage Iowans and out-of-state visitors to fish. Not only does fishing provide recreation and food, but it also provides economic activities to the communities where fishing is prevalent. So to be safe, people eating fish caught in Iowa's lakes and streams need to periodically review the fish consumption advisory lists.

Every year the DNR tests the fish in about 30 to 35 lakes and rivers, collecting a total of 50 to 55 samples. The samples typically are from 3 to 5 fish of the same species.

The samples from one species are co-mingled and tested as a unit. Both predator and bottom-feeding fish are tested.² The DNR also tests a few turtles each year. The DNR's goal is to test each lake in Iowa every 10 years and each river every 5 years.³

¹ An example of a fish consumption for the Cedar River is: for the Cedar River from the Highway 218 bridge at Floyd to the Iowa and Minnesota state line, eat only one meal a week of smallmouth bass, walleye or northern pike.

² John Olson, from the Environmental Services, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, phone conversation with Pam Mackey Taylor, September 20, 2012

³ According to John Olson of the Department of Natural Resources, the DNR has fallen behind in its testing schedule.

Once a fish consumption advisory has been issued for a water body, the fish are periodically tested to determine whether the contaminant remains present in the fish. Once two successive tests show that the contamination levels have been reduced below the threshold for that chemical, the advisories are removed.⁴ The DNR's goal is to test the fish every other year once an advisory is in place.

If the fish sample is below the advisory threshold, but is close to the threshold, the river or lake is put in a follow-up status. The goal is for samples to be taken every other year to determine if a consumption advisory needs to be issued.

Policy

The Iowa Chapter supports a ten-fold increase in testing of fish for toxics. The chapter supports targeting industrial areas and areas near currently-used coal-fired power plants as well as near sites where there have been coal-fired power plant retirements.



Photo credit: Tim McCabe, USDA NRCS

The Chapter encourages the DNR to aggressively perform follow-up testing if fish are close to toxic limits, to ensure that human health is protected.

The Chapter supports policies that require signs to be posted near bridges and public access points if fish consumption advisories are in effect (currently signs are not required).

⁴ Pool 12 of the Mississippi River, which is the area between Lock and Dam 11 in Dubuque and Lock and Dam 12 at Bellevue in Jackson County had an advisory for mercury removed after follow-up testing in the fall of 2006 and in 2007. The original advisory, issued early in 2006, warned people to eat only one meal a week of walleye, sauger, largemouth bass, white bass or northern pike.