



## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO

**GOVERNOR**

MIKE D. McDANIEL, Ph.D.

**SECRETARY**

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**Contact:**

Rodney Mallett

**Telephone:**

225.219.3964

### **Gulf States agree there is no need for seafood advisories**

BATON ROUGE --The states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana agree that there is no need for advisories concerning the quality of seafood in the Hurricane Katrina-affected area, which includes the coastal waters and estuaries from New Orleans, La., to Gulf Shores, Ala., including Lake Pontchartrain, Mississippi Sound and Mobile Bay.

Available data obtained on the quality of surface waters from the area estuaries show no levels of toxic chemicals above concern that would warrant fish consumption advisories.

Comprehensive seafood tissue sampling plans are being developed to confirm the safety of seafood caught in the affected areas. These plans are developed cooperatively among the States and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Seafood sampling will be implemented within two weeks and include long-term monitoring for one to three years.

High bacteria levels have been noted in flood waters to Lake Pontchartrain and areas of bacteria contamination can be expected throughout the affected state's estuaries from any significant rainfall event. However, health officials advise that by cooking seafood thoroughly, risks associated with bacteria in ambient waters are diminished to below levels of concern.

Consuming raw seafood always poses a potential risk from bacterial contamination. Areas currently subject to oyster harvest in the affected areas are closed until routine sampling from existing state Molluscan Shellfish Programs determines area waters are of adequate quality to reopen oyster grounds.

Additional advice to consumers of area seafood would be to avoid seafood caught in areas with visible oil sheens or slicks, only consume fish that are alive when caught and use proper hygiene when handling and preparing seafood for consumption. Also, state health officials advise that following simple guidelines is appropriate when preparing fish and seafood at anytime, not only after a storm event. These guidelines include keeping seafood cold until ready to cook, thoroughly cook seafood, eat finfish fillets and avoid eating the skin or organs. Broiling, grilling or poaching fish are healthy, low-fat methods of cooking and are also recommended.

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