

Appendix 3. Great Lakes Human Health Effects Research Program



ATSDR

AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES AND DISEASE REGISTRY

What is ATSDR?
 The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the federal public health agency whose mission is to prevent adverse human health effects that result from hazardous waste exposure. The agency conducts assessments or evaluations to determine whether communities have been exposed to hazardous waste, and then provides health information to prevent harmful exposures and related diseases.



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Environmental Health

Great Lakes Human Health Effects Research Program

Legislative Mandate

“Not later than September 1994 ...The Environmental Protection Agency, in consultation with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the Great Lakes States shall submit to Congress a report assessing the adverse effects of water pollutants in the Great Lakes system on the health of persons in the Great Lakes States.” With mandate fulfilled, the agencies submitted the first report to Congress in September 1995. The report identified several key issues:

- Critical Great Lakes pollutants of concern, i.e., dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides, mercury, and lead
- Vulnerable populations, i.e., sport and subsistence fish anglers, pregnant women, fetuses, nursing infants, young children, and the elderly, and urban poor
- Sensitive human health end points, i.e., behavioral, developmental, reproductive, neurologic, endocrinologic, and immunologic
- Priority areas of research for the Great Lakes region to assess adverse human health outcomes
- ATSDR-funded research projects ongoing in the Great Lakes region

The ATSDR Great Lakes Human Health Effects Research Program (GLHHERP) has made significant progress in researching and evaluating findings that address public health issues associated with exposure to contaminants in the basin.

Sociodemographic Data

- A recent survey estimated that 4.7 million people consumed Great Lakes sport fish in a given year; 43.9% of the respondents were women (Tilden et al. 1997).
- Knowledge of and adherence to health advisories for Great Lakes sport fish vary across different populations (Fitzgerald et al. 1996; Waller et al. 1996; Tilden et al. 1997).
- Fifty percent of respondents to the survey who had eaten Great Lakes sport fish were aware of the health advisory for fish, and awareness differed significantly by race, sex, educational level, fish consumption, and state of residence (Tilden et al. 1997).
- Ninety-seven percent of American Indian men were aware of local advisories against consuming Great Lakes sport fish; however, 80% of the men ate fish (Fitzgerald et al. 1999).
- Eighty percent of minorities who had eaten Great Lakes sport fish were unaware of the fish advisory, and awareness was especially low among women (Tilden et al. 1997).
- Fish is an essential component of the diets of minority populations and American Indians; they consume fish that tend to have higher levels of contaminants (Fitzgerald et al. 1996; Waller et al. 1996).