

For Immediate Release*news release*

From The Texas Department of Health
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Texas Department of Health Advises Reduced Consumption of Fish from Caddo Lake

Dr. David R. Smith, Commissioner of Health, today advised recreational fishermen and others to reduce consumption of largemouth bass and freshwater drum from Caddo Lake because of health concerns related to mercury contamination.

Recent concern over mercury contamination of freshwater fish in the southeastern United States caused Texas officials to sample fish in a number of lakes in the eastern portion of Texas. The Texas Department of Health (TDH), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) cooperated to collect fish tissue samples.

The agencies collected and tested samples from Caddo Lake, Dam B (Steinhagen Reservoir), Sam Rayburn Reservoir, Toledo Bend Reservoir, Taylor Bayou, and Lake O' The Pines. TDH laboratory test results showed that largemouth bass and freshwater drum from Caddo Lake had elevated levels of mercury. Fish sample test results from the other lakes to date are inconclusive. However, TDH and the other agencies, will continue their investigation in these and in other East Texas waters to see if other areas may have contaminated fish and if additional advisories are warranted.

As a result of the sampling, Dr. Smith has recommended that people not consume any Caddo Lake largemouth bass greater than 18 inches in length or freshwater drum of any size. TPWD regulations for Caddo Lake already forbid the taking of largemouth bass between 14 and 18 inches long. Dr. Smith also advised that children younger than 6 and women of childbearing age limit consumption of largemouth bass less than 14 inches in length to not more than one meal (not to exceed eight ounces of fish) each month.

"TDH will collect samples of other species of fish from Caddo Lake to determine if they are also contaminated. Subsequent advisories may be necessary," Dr. Smith added.

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He explained, "This is not a ban on fishing or even a ban on eating fish. It simply advises people of a potential health risk that can be avoided by reduced consumption."

Regular, long-term consumption of mercury can cause harmful effects to the nervous system. Symptoms of the effects include tingling of the skin, loss of coordination, and visual and hearing impairments. Young children and infants exposed before birth may experience severe damage to the central nervous system and brain from levels of mercury exposure which are not considered harmful to adults.

The source of the mercury appears to be atmospheric deposition or natural runoff; however, TNRCC is continuing its investigation of possible other sources. Texas and Louisiana health officials also are working to develop a common approach to solving the problem.

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(For more information, contact Richard Thompson, Director, Division of Seafood Safety, at 512-719-0215 or Margaret Wilson, Director, Public Information Office, at 512-458-7400.)

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