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From The Texas Department of Health
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TDH Advises Limiting Consumption of Fish from Two East Texas Lakes

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) today issued an advisory warning people to limit the amount of fish they eat from Lake Pruitt and Lake Kimball. Lake Pruitt, also known as Black Cypress Bayou, is in Cass County. Lake Kimball is in Hardin and Tyler counties. The advisory was issued after TDH laboratory tests found high levels of mercury in fish from the lakes.

Adults are advised to eat no more than two eight-ounce servings per month. Children under 11 should eat no more than two four-ounce servings per month. The advisory applies to all species of fish from the two small lakes.

"This doesn't mean that someone who occasionally eats more of the fish than recommended will definitely be harmed," said Texas Commissioner of Health William Archer, M.D. "The threat comes from eating more than is recommended over an extended time period."

Continual ingestion of methyl mercury, the mercury compound in the fish, can harm the human brain and nervous system. Young children are especially at risk, and the brain and nervous system in a developing fetus can be permanently damaged if the mother-to-be eats foods containing elevated levels of mercury during pregnancy.

Mercury is a naturally occurring element that gets into the air and water from the weathering of the earth's crust, from the burning of fossil fuels and from some industrial discharges and emissions. Officials said a specific source of mercury in fish from the two lakes has not been identified.

Elevated mercury levels in fish have been found in several southeastern states, typically in areas marked by acidic water and soil and by high organic material from plentiful plant life.

In 1995, TDH issued a similar advisory for certain species of fish from Caddo Lake, Big Cypress Creek and the Sam Rayburn, Toledo Bend and B.A. Steinhagen reservoirs in East Texas. In 1997, a TDH consumption advisory was issued after elevated mercury levels were found in king mackerel from the Gulf of Mexico. Both advisories are still in effect.

Officials said the mercury content in the water in the two lakes is low. The elevated mercury levels in the fish are the result of accumulation along the food chain. There is no risk of mercury poisoning from contact with the water in the two lakes.

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(For more information contact Kirk Wiles, Director, TDH Seafood Safety Division, at 512-719-0215; or Doug McBride, TDH Public Information Officer, at 512-458-7524.)