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news release

From The Texas Department of Health
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TDH Recommends Limiting Consumption of Largemouth Bass from Lake Ratcliff

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) is advising people to limit their consumption of largemouth bass from Lake Ratcliff in Houston County in East Texas because of elevated levels of mercury.

TDH recommends that adults eat no more than two 8-ounce servings of largemouth bass from the lake per month and that children eat no more than two 4-ounce servings per month.

Kirk Wiles, director of TDH's seafood safety program, said frequent consumption of mercury can harm the brain and nervous system.

"Fetuses and young children are especially sensitive to the effects of mercury. It can cause permanent damage to developing brains and nervous systems," he said. "Women who are pregnant or who may become pregnant certainly should follow the advisory."

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. Wiles said acidic water and abundant plant life can contribute to elevated mercury levels.

There is no risk of mercury contamination from fishing, skiing, boating, swimming and other recreational activities in Lake Ratcliff, Wiles said. He said the elevated levels of mercury in the largemouth bass from the lake are the result of accumulation along the natural food chain.

The advisory was issued after TDH laboratory tests of largemouth bass, channel catfish, blue catfish and river carpsucker from the lake revealed the elevated mercury levels in the largemouth bass. Mercury levels in the other fish were low.

Wiles said the advisory only applies to the largemouth bass.

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(News media: for more information contact Kirk Wiles, Director, TDH Seafood Safety Division, at 512-719-0215; or Doug McBride, TDH Press Officer, at 512-458-7524.)

TDH News Online:
www.tdh.state.tx.us/news/news.htm