

*For Immediate Release**news release*

From The Texas Department of Health  
1100 West 49th Street Austin, Texas 78756 (512) 458-7405

### **State Health Official Issues Fishing Ban**

Dr. David Smith, Texas Commissioner of Health, today banned all fishing in the Donna Reservoir and its interconnecting canal system. He made his announcement at a 2 p.m. press conference held jointly by the Texas Department of Health (TDH) and the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission (TNRCC) in the conference room of the Mid-Valley Airport in Weslaco. Among others, representing TNRCC was Steve Neimeyer, manager for Border Affairs.

According to Dr. Smith, the mandatory ban on fishing was prompted by the latest round of fish sampling and analysis undertaken by TDH in Hidalgo County. Analysis showed elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in 40 percent of the fish samples studied. The sampling is part of a large-scale investigation of fish contamination in the area.

Dr. Smith stressed that, "Based on information supplied by the TNRCC, there is no evidence of PCBs in the area's public drinking water supply."

The most recent round of sampling reaffirms contamination discovered in earlier testing. Fish samples were collected from areas where people routinely fish in the Donna system. Highest concentrations of PCBs were observed in fish taken from the Donna intake canals. "Based upon all these samples results, we determined that in order to minimize the risk to the public's health a total ban on fishing is warranted." Dr. Smith added that the ban will be enforced by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Dr. Smith said that eight of the 10 fish taken by TDH from the feeder canal running from the Rio Grande to the Donna Reservoir contained significantly elevated levels of PCBs. As a result of these findings, TDH will begin immediately to take fish samples from the Rio Grande river and the Donna intake canal.

TNRCC and TDH will use the results of the Rio Grande sampling in their efforts to

-more-

pinpoint the source of the contamination. According to Dr. Smith, if the Rio Grande fish samples show elevated PCB levels, restrictions on fishing and fish consumption might have to be imposed on a portion of the river. TDH will continue to post signs marking fishing sites affected by the fish consumption ban. Dr. Smith added that TDH hopes laboratory analysis of the Rio Grande samples can be completed and results made available in two to three weeks.

Dr. Smith and indicated that if contamination is found in the Rio Grande fish samples, TDH will seek federal funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to undertake an extensive fish sampling program along that portion of the Rio Grande bordering Hidalgo and Cameron counties.

Dr. Smith outlined these actions under way at TDH:

- TDH immediately will begin fish sampling in the Rio Grande near the intake of the Donna Reservoir feeder canal.
- If excessive levels of PCBs or other hazardous toxins are found in the fish samples, TDH will request funding support from EPA to significantly expand fish sampling in the Rio Grande and will recommend water and sediment sampling as well.
- TDH will repeat its request that the President and Congress support the establishment of a federally funded border laboratory to speed analyses of air, water, soil, human and wildlife samples.
- TDH will seek the assistance and cooperation of the Mexican federal government and state governments, Mexican border cities, as well as organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization and the International Boundaries Water Commission in expanding environmental monitoring and surveillance along the Rio Grande.
- TDH will repeat its support for the Border Health Commission as proposed by U.S. Rep. Ron Coleman to facilitate this type of binational cooperation.

-30-

*(For more information, contact Glen Provost, Associate Commissioner for Environmental and Consumer Health, at 512/458-7541 or Margaret Wilson, Public Information Director, Public Information Office, at 512/458-7400.)*