INFORMATION ABOUT EATING FISH FROM THE ALAMO RIVER AND THE NEW RIVER

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)
California Environmental Protection Agency
November 2016

Why did OEHHA develop an advisory for eating fish from the Alamo River and the New River?

OEHHA developed advisories for the Alamo River and the New River because of mercury, DDTs, PCBs, and selenium found in the fish caught from these water bodies. The Alamo River and the New River are located in Imperial County, between the Salton Sea and the US-Mexico border. These advisories are part of an ongoing effort by OEHHA to provide safe-eating advice for fish in different California water bodies.

Why should I eat fish?

- Low-contaminant fish are an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish each week.

- Fish are a good source of protein, vitamins, and are a primary dietary source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Eating low-contaminant fish while pregnant may help the baby's brain develop.

Which chemicals are of concern for people eating fish from the Alamo River and the New River?

- Mercury
    - Mercury is a metal that comes from natural sources, mining, and air fallout from burning coal and other fuels. It is the most commonly found contaminant in fish.
    - Too much methylmercury, the form of mercury found in fish, can harm the brain, especially in fetuses, babies, and children. Mothers can pass methylmercury to their babies during pregnancy.
    - Because fetuses, babies, and children are especially sensitive to mercury, OEHHA has one set of advice for the amount of mercury-containing fish that women age 18-45 years and children should eat, and another set of advice for women 46 years and older and men 18 years and older.

- DDTs
    - DDT and its byproducts (DDTs) are pesticides. While banned in the 1970s, they may still be found in fish sampled from California water bodies.
    - High levels of DDTs can cause health problems including cancer or adverse effects on the nervous system.
    - DDTs can build up to very high levels in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish. That is why OEHHA recommends eating only skinless fillet (meat) of fish.

- Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)
    - PCBs are industrial chemicals. While banned in the 1970s, they persist for many years in the environment and are still found in the air and water from spills, leaks, and improper disposal.
    - High levels of PCBs can cause health problems. Some forms of PCBs caused cancer in animal studies.
    - PCBs can build up to very high levels in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish. That is why OEHHA recommends eating only skinless fillet (meat) of fish.

- Selenium
    - Selenium is a metalloid that comes from natural sources and is an essential nutrient for many health processes.
    - High levels of selenium can cause health problems including hair loss, gastrointestinal distress, dizziness and tremors.

How did OEHHA determine the consumption guidelines for fish from the Alamo River and the New River?

- OEHHA compared chemical levels in fish caught from the Alamo River and the New River to levels that are considered safe for human consumption.
- OEHHA's consumption guidelines balance the risks and benefits of fish consumption.

What does OEHHA recommend for people who want to eat fish from the Alamo River?

- OEHHA recommends the amount and type of fish that can be eaten each week as "servings". A serving is about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings.

- Women 18-45 years and children 1-17 years
    - Can eat:
        - 2 total servings per week of Channel Catfish, or
        - 3 total servings per week of carp or Tilapia

- Women 46 years and older and men age 18 years and older
    - Can eat:
        - 3 total servings per week of carp, Channel Catfish, or Tilapia

What does OEHHA recommend for people who want to eat fish from the New River?

- OEHHA recommends the amount and type of fish that can be eaten each week as "servings". A serving is about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings.

- Women 18-45 years and children 1-17 years
    - Should not eat Channel Catfish
    - Can eat:
        - 1 serving per week of carp, or
        - 4 total servings per week of Tilapia

- Women 46 years and older and men age 18 years and older
    - Can eat:
        - 1 serving per week of Channel Catfish, or
        - 2 total servings per week of carp, or
        - 4 total servings per week of Tilapia

What else can I do to protect my health and my family's?

- Eat a variety of fish.
- Eat smaller (younger) fish of legal size.
- Eat only the skinless fillet or meat portion of fish.
- Thoroughly cook the fish, allow the juice to drain away.
- Learn about OEHHA's guidelines for eating sport fish in California:
    - Visit www.oehha.ca.gov (click on "FISH", then "Fish Advisories"), or call OEHHA at (916) 324-7572 or (510) 622-3170
    - Check the Freshwater or Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations booklets from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, or visit https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Regulations

A Guide to Eating Fish from the Alamo River

Women 18 - 45 years and Children 1 - 17 years

Carp

Tilapia

Channel Catfish

3 total servings a week **OR** **2 total servings a week**

Women 46 years and older and Men 18 years and older

Carp

Tilapia

Channel Catfish

3 total servings a week

What is a serving?

For Adults **For Children**

A serving is about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings.

Why eat fish?

Eating fish is good for your health. Fish have omega-3s that can reduce your risk for heart disease and improve how the brain develops in unborn babies and children.

What is the concern?

Some fish have high levels of mercury, DDTs, PCBs, or selenium. Mercury and DDTs can harm the brain, especially in unborn babies and children. PCBs can cause cancer. High levels of selenium can cause health problems.

California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment • www.oehha.ca.gov/fish • (916) 324-7572 • fish@oehha.ca.gov

A Guide to Eating Fish from the New River

Women 18 - 45 years and Children 1 - 17 years

Tilapia

Carp

Channel Catfish

4 total servings a week OR	1 total serving a week	Do not eat

Women 46 years and older and Men 18 years and older

Tilapia

Carp

Channel Catfish

4 total servings a week OR	2 total servings a week OR	1 total serving a week

What is a serving?

For Adults **For Children**

A serving is about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings.

Why eat fish?

Eating fish is good for your health. Fish have omega-3s that can reduce your risk for heart disease and improve how the brain develops in unborn babies and children.

What is the concern?

Some fish have high levels of mercury, DDTs, PCBs, or selenium. Mercury and DDTs can harm the brain, especially in unborn babies and children. PCBs can cause cancer. High levels of selenium can cause health problems.

California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment • www.oehha.ca.gov/fish • (916) 324-7572 • fish@oehha.ca.gov