



Press Release

California Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
Lauren Zeise, PhD, Director

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Contact:
Sam Delson (916) 324-0955 (O)
(916) 764-0955 (C)

Fish Advisory for Squaw Lake in Imperial County Offers Safe Eating Advice for Six Fish Species

SACRAMENTO – A state fish advisory issued today for [Squaw Lake](#) in Imperial County provides safe eating advice for black bass species, Channel Catfish, Common Carp, Flathead Catfish, Striped Bass, and sunfish species.

The California Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) developed the recommendations based on the levels of mercury, PCBs, and selenium found in fish caught from the lake.

The fish species tested at Squaw Lake had lower contaminant levels than is typical at many other California water bodies. All species tested at Squaw Lake can be eaten at least twice a week.

“Many fish have nutrients that may reduce the risk of heart disease and are excellent sources of protein,” said Dr. Lauren Zeise, director of OEHHA. “By following our guidelines for fish caught in Squaw Lake, people can safely eat fish low in chemical contaminants and enjoy the well-known health benefits of fish consumption.”

Squaw Lake is located near the community of Winterhaven, just above the Imperial Dam on the Colorado River.

When consuming fish from Squaw Lake, women ages 18-49 and children ages 1-17 may safely eat a maximum of four total servings per week of Channel Catfish, Common Carp, or Flathead Catfish, or three servings per week of black bass species or sunfish species, or two servings per week of Striped Bass.

Women ages 50 and older and men ages 18 and older may safely eat a maximum of five total servings per week of Flathead Catfish, or four servings per week of Channel Catfish or Common Carp, or three servings per week of black bass species, Striped Bass, or sunfish species.

One serving is an eight-ounce fish fillet, measured prior to cooking, which is roughly the size and thickness of your hand. Children should be given smaller servings. For small fish species, several individual fish may make up a single serving.

For fish species found in Squaw Lake that are not included in this advisory, OEHHA recommends following the [statewide advisory for eating fish from California lakes and reservoirs without site-specific advice](#).

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal that is released into the environment from mining and burning coal. It accumulates in fish in the form of methylmercury, which can damage the brain and nervous system, especially in developing children and fetuses. Because of this, OEHHA provides a separate set of recommendations specifically for children up to age 17, and women of childbearing age (18-49 years).

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a group of industrial chemicals. At high levels of exposure, they can cause health problems, including cancer. Although they were banned in the United States in the late 1970s, PCBs persist in the environment from spills, leaks or improper disposal. PCBs accumulate in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish. In order to reduce exposure from PCB contaminated fish, OEHHA recommends eating only the skinless fillet (meat) portion of the fish.

Selenium is an essential nutrient that is naturally present in the environment. However, high-level exposure can cause health problems such as hair loss, gastrointestinal distress, dizziness, and tremors.

Eating fish in amounts slightly greater than the advisory's recommendations is not likely to cause health problems if it is done occasionally, such as eating fish caught during an annual vacation.

Squaw Lake advisory recommendations join more than 100 other OEHHA advisories that provide site-specific, health-based fish consumption advice for many of the places where people catch and eat fish in California, including lakes, rivers, bays, reservoirs, and the California coast.

The health advisory and eating advice for Squaw Lake – as well as eating guidelines for other fish species in California bodies of water – are available on OEHHA's [Fish Advisories webpage](#). The [Squaw Lake](#) poster is available in both English and Spanish.

OEHHA's mission is to protect and enhance the health of Californians and our state's environment through scientific evaluations that inform, support and guide regulatory and other actions.

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