

Q: Why are health officials reminding the public to avoid eating fish and other seafood from Area 1 of New Bedford Harbor?

A: In 1979 the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) promulgated regulations to close Area 1 to all fishing activities due to significant polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination. Recent reports of individuals fishing in that area are prompting health and environmental officials to raise public awareness regarding the health risks associated with consumption of fish, lobster, and shellfish taken from Area 1 and regulatory bans.

Q: Where is Area 1 located and what are the boundaries?

A: Area 1 is bounded by the communities of New Bedford and Fairhaven and includes all areas of the Acushnet River and New Bedford Harbor north of the Hurricane Barrier as shown on the map. The Hurricane Barrier is located near Gifford Street in New Bedford and Fort Phoenix Beach State Reservation in Fairhaven.

Q: What is the concern about Area 1?

A: The Acushnet River estuary, New Bedford Harbor, and parts of Buzzards Bay sediments are contaminated with PCBs. The highest levels of PCBs in seafood are found in fish, lobster, and shellfish in Area 1. **Fish, lobster or shellfish caught from Area 1 should not be consumed.**

Q: What are PCBs and where do they come from?

A: PCBs are a group of manmade chemicals that are highly stable, heat resistant, and non-flammable and they do not evaporate or dissolve easily in water. Historically, PCBs have been used as industrial chemicals and insulating material in electrical



equipment, and were added to paint, pesticides, carbonless copy paper, printing inks and dyes. The manufacture of PCBs was banned in 1979. Industries that once operated in New Bedford primarily used PCBs in the manufacture of electrical capacitors and transformers. Researchers have found that exposure to PCBs from consuming contaminated fish can pose a risk to human health. The seriousness of the effect varies.

Q: How are people exposed to PCBs?

A: In general, consumption of contaminated fish and shellfish is the major source of human exposure to PCBs. PCBs concentrate (accumulate) in the tissue and internal organs of fish. As big fish eat little fish, they accumulate all the PCBs that have been eaten by smaller fish that are below them in the food chain. This process is known as bioaccumulation. Bottom feeding and high fat containing fish tend to accumulate higher PCB levels than other varieties.

Q: Where can I find fish that are safe to eat?

A: Local restaurants, fish markets, and other food establishments are a safe source. They are inspected at least annually by the local Board of Health in accordance with 105 CMR 590.000: State Sanitary Code Chapter X – Minimum Sanitation Standards for Food Establishments, also known as the Food Code. Routine inspections help ensure all consumers can safely enjoy the many benefits of our local fishing industry. New Bedford's commercial fishing fleet travels many miles outside of the harbor to fishing grounds hundreds of miles out to sea, and well beyond the area impacted by PCB contamination so their catch is safe to eat.

MDPH guidelines for pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers, and children under 12 years old:

Do Not Eat: Freshwater fish caught in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds in Massachusetts*

Safe To Eat: Fish that are stocked in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds in Massachusetts

Do Not Eat: Bluefish caught off the Massachusetts coast

Do Not Eat: Lobsters, flounder, soft-shell clams and bivalves from Boston Harbor

Guidelines for everyone, including the groups listed above:

- Do Not Eat:**
- Fish, shellfish, or lobsters from Area I of New Bedford Harbor
 - Lobsters or bottom feeding fish from Area II of New Bedford Harbor
 - Lobsters from Area III of New Bedford Harbor

Do Not Eat: Lobster tomalley

A varied diet, including safe fish, will lead to good nutrition and better health.

In 2017, the federal government issued additional advice about safe fish consumption. Please visit:

www.fda.gov/fishadvice and www.epa.gov/fishadvice

*More specific consumption advice is available for certain freshwater bodies that have been tested at: www.mass.gov/dph/fishadvisories or by calling 617-624-5757

Q: The advice in this pamphlet is specific to the area inside of the hurricane barrier in New Bedford Harbor. Are fish outside of the hurricane barrier in the harbor safe to eat?

A: Although the most contaminated fish are generally found inside the hurricane barrier, MDPH also advises against eating lobster or bottom feeding fish from Area II (the waters generally south of Area I and

north of a line extending from Ricketson's Point in South Dartmouth westerly to Wilbur Point on Sconticut Neck), or lobster from Area III (the waters generally south of Area II and north of a line extending from Mishaum Point on Smith Neck in the town of Dartmouth north and west to Gong "3" on Hursett Rock off New Bedford Harbor and continuous north and west to Rocky Point on West Island in the town of Fairhaven).

Q: What is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) doing to address PCB contamination issues in New Bedford Harbor?

A: The U.S. EPA has been involved with the New Bedford Harbor cleanup since the 1980s, following discovery of PCBs in sediment and fish and designation to the NPL in 1983. In 1998, EPA proposed a dredging remedy for the Upper and Lower Harbors, and full scale dredging started in 2004. From 2004 to 2013 EPA operated with \$15 million on the harbor for approximately 45 days a year to address contaminated material. On September 19, 2013 EPA finalized a Settlement with the responsible party, AVX, for \$366.25 million. This settlement will accelerate the cleanup of PCB's in the harbor to be complete in an estimated 5 to 7 years. For more information on the EPA clean-up, or for other site-related questions, please contact the EPA at 617-918-1003 or visit www.epa.gov/nbh.

Q: Who should I contact if I have health questions about seafood consumption restrictions for Area 1 or other fish consumption advice?

A: For health-related questions, Area 1 restrictions on fish, lobster, and shellfish, or to learn more about how to choose fish that are safe to eat, please contact the MDPH Bureau of Environmental Health at 617-624-5757 or the New Bedford Health Department at 508-991-6199.

Revised August 2017

**Health Officials
Remind Consumers
Not to Eat Fish,
Lobster and Shellfish
from Area 1/Inside the
Hurricane Barrier of
New Bedford Harbor**



Bureau of Environmental Health
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
www.mass.gov/dph/environmental_health



This brochure was developed by MDPH in partnership with the City of New Bedford and the U.S. EPA.