

# NEWS RELEASE



September 29, 2005

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Frederick P. Cerise, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

## **Agencies to Implement Fish Sampling to test for Possible Contaminants**

*Consumption advisories not needed for Lake Pontchartrain at this  
time*

Baton Rouge -- The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries are working together to ensure the quality of seafood in the Hurricane Katrina-affected area, including Lake Pontchartrain, is satisfactory and safe for consumption.

Data obtained on the quality of flood waters discharged to Lake Pontchartrain and from the estuary surrounding the lake show no levels of toxic chemicals above concern that would warrant fish consumption advisories at this time. Plans for comprehensive seafood tissue sampling are being developed to ensure the safety of seafood caught in the effected areas. These plans will be implemented within two weeks.

High bacteria levels have been noted in flood waters that are pumped back into Lake Pontchartrain and some localized areas of bacteria contamination have been observed. However, state health officials note that this is not uncommon after a hurricane.

“We have noted some elevated levels of fecal coliform in Lake Pontchartrain,” said Dr. Jimmy Guidry, state health officer. “This is not unexpected because it is typical to see elevated levels of bacteria in the water after any storm activity. However, by cooking seafood thoroughly, risks associated with bacteria in ambient waters are diminished to below levels of concern.”

Guidry added that health officials will work with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to determine the extent of seafood harvesting in Lake Pontchartrain under normal circumstances to get a sense of the size of the industry that could be impacted.

“In the meantime, we remind people that all commercial seafood available in the marketplace at the current time does not pose a threat from the hurricane because all seafood on the market was harvested pre-Katrina,” Guidry added.

Recreational fishing in and around Lake Pontchartrain includes spotted seatrout, red drum, southern flounder, Atlantic croaker, black drum, and sheepshead, as well as recreational harvest of white and brown shrimp and blue crabs.

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## **Seafood Safety**

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Commercial harvest from the lake is dominated by blue crabs and shrimp, with some additional harvest of black drum, sheepshead, and flounder. Some additional species are landed in much smaller quantities by both recreational and commercial harvesters, including sand seatrout and spot.

Consuming raw seafood always poses a potential risk from bacterial contamination, but the thorough cooking of any fish or shellfish caught in Lake Pontchartrain will eliminate the threat of food poisoning.

A media briefing will be held on Friday, September 30, to provide additional information on water testing and seafood safety, as it relates to seafood harvested from Louisiana waters. Members of the Department of Health and Hospitals, the Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and LSU AgCenter – Department of Food Sciences will be on hand.

**WHO:** Dr. Jimmy Guidry, state health officer of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Chris Piehler of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Harry Blanchet of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Jon Bell of LSU's AgCenter Department of Food Sciences

**WHAT:** Media briefing on seafood safety

**WHEN:** Friday, Sept. 30, 11 a.m.

**WHERE:** Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

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Baton Rouge, LA