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Levels of DDT and PCB in fish higher near Palos Verde Shelf, Los Angeles/Long Beach
Lower in Orange County, Northern Santa Monica Bay and Ventura

SAN FRANCISCO- According to a joint study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program, DDT and PCB concentrations in fish remain higher in the Palos Verdes and San Pedro Bay areas, and relatively lower in Orange County, northern Santa Monica Bay and Ventura.

Between 2002 and 2004, state and federal biologists collected over 2,500 fish from 30 locations along the southern California coast, targeting 23 of the most commonly caught recreational fish such as croaker, bass, surfperch, and mackerel.

This recent study expands our knowledge of the Palos Verdes Shelf fish contamination; these latest results indicate that:

- DDT and PCB concentrations in fish were generally higher in the Palos Verdes shelf region than in areas further south such as Orange County or northern Santa Monica Bay and Ventura;
- In areas where sediments are more heavily contaminated, certain species of fish, especially white croaker, accumulate higher amounts of DDT and PCBs;
- Mercury levels vary by species and fish size. Bigger, older fish and fish higher up on the food chain generally have higher mercury concentrations than smaller, younger fish or fish lower on the food chain.

The next step is to provide these data to California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), which creates guidelines for consuming recreationally caught fish in California.

"It has been more than fifteen years since a large-scale survey of contaminants in fish in the area has been conducted," said Keith Takata, the EPA's Superfund division director for the EPA's Pacific Southwest region. "The EPA can now update our understanding of the health risks associated with eating contaminated fish while taking appropriate actions to best reduce risks for surrounding communities."

"Although we were primarily concerned with DDT and PCBs, no discussion of fish contamination is complete without addressing mercury, which we included in our analysis," said Greg Baker, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration environmental scientist and project manager for the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program. "Once OEHHA reviews these data and issues updated fish consumption advisories, people will be able to make better choices about where to fish, and the kinds of fish that are best to catch and eat."

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The data from this recent study will be used by multiple agencies, including California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California Department of Fish and Game and the EPA, which is using the fish data to evaluate ecological and human health risks related to the Palos Verdes Shelf superfund site.

At the Palos Verdes Shelf, large deposits of DDT and PCBs sit in the sediments deep underwater. The chemicals came from area industries, including a large DDT manufacturing facility, Montrose Chemical Company, which closed in 1982.

High levels of DDT and PCBs off the coast of Los Angeles led the Federal and State of California governments (now working together under the Montrose Settlements Restoration Program) to file suit against the polluters in 1990, with EPA joining the suit soon after. The State of California issued advisories in 1991 to caution people about possible health risks of eating certain fish in the area. The EPA Superfund program initiated actions to address the Palos Verdes Shelf site in 1997.

The EPA and the Montrose Settlement Restoration Program work closely together on projects related to DDT and PCB contamination in the area, with the EPA focusing on site investigation and human health and ecological risk reduction. The Montrose Settlements Restoration Program focuses on projects to restore natural resources - such as fish habitat and birds - affected by the contaminants, as well as projects to educate anglers and the general public about healthier alternatives to the more contaminated fish.

DDT is considered a probable human carcinogen, and can cause liver, reproductive and nervous system damage. PCBs have been demonstrated to cause a variety of adverse health effects, including impact on the immune, reproductive, nervous systems.

Current fish consumption advisories for ocean waters between Point Dume and Dana Point may be found at California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment web site, www.oehha.ca.gov/fish.html.

For more information, please visit: www.montroserestoration.gov, or www.epa.gov/region09/features/pvshelf.

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