

## Toxic dumping's long legacy

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The practices of one of Southern California's worst corporate polluters continues haunting local marine life more than 25 years after the company closed shop and left town.

For three decades beginning in 1947, the Montrose Chemical plant in Torrance flushed about 1,800 tons of the now-banned pesticide DDT through storm drains and into the ocean off Palos Verdes and San Pedro.

Montrose, which closed in 1982, also dumped several hundred tons of DDT-contaminated waste into the ocean near Catalina Island.

The cumulative effect of this toxic mess on local marine life was staggering. Early on, bald eagles began laying DDT-tainted eggs so brittle they would crack under the weight of a brooding mother.

The birds' numbers soon dwindled to a handful.

Health studies showed fish populations, including sportfishing favorites like white croaker, bass and queenfish, contained very high levels of DDT, which is linked to cancer in humans.

In 1990, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency joined other public agencies in a landmark lawsuit against Montrose, leading to a \$140 million settlement to pay for wildlife conservation efforts and environmental cleanup.

While conservation efforts have helped re-establish bald eagle populations on the Channel Islands, the settlement money can't be used to remove DDT from the ocean floor until scientists develop a method to avoid "stirring up the dust" and causing more widespread contamination.

And despite the passage of time, a new federal survey shows certain fish species off the Southern California coast continue to show high levels of DDT and the industrial chemical PCB.

Between 2002 and 2004, biologists collected 2,600-plus fish from locations off Ventura, Orange and Los Angeles counties, targeting 23 of the most commonly caught recreational fish, including croaker, bass, surfperch and mackerel.

Tests showed that white croaker, in particular, continue to harbor dangerously high levels of toxins, according to the report, released Monday by the EPA and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The survey also reveals mercury levels in local fish populations, with black croaker, Pacific barracuda and white seabass showing the highest levels.

As has been their practice for years, agencies urge people to avoid white croaker entirely and eat most other locally-caught fish sparingly.

The area most affected by contamination is just off Palos Verdes, although areas in the harbor, off Cabrillo Beach and near the Belmont Pier also show higher-than-normal levels.

The NOAA is currently developing new public warnings, which may include signs, for fisherman in and around San Pedro Bay.

With this information, "people will be able to make better choices about where to fish, and the kinds of fish that are best to catch and eat," said NOAA scientist Greg Baker.

It's worth noting that San Pedro-based sportfishing boats and commercial vessels angle for fish mostly unaffected by contamination.

Here are a few of the warnings and advice:

White croaker: Do not eat if caught inside breakwater. If caught outside breakwater, eat no more than once a month.

Black croaker, surfperch, queenfish: no more than one meal every two to four weeks.

Larger, older fish higher on the food chain tend to have greater levels of mercury.

DDT and PCB concentrations in fish are generally higher off Palos Verdes than in Orange and Ventura counties and Santa Monica Bay.

To read the full report, visit [www.montroserestoration.gov](http://www.montroserestoration.gov).

Coast Guard gets older

Happy belated birthday to the United States Coast Guard, which celebrated 217 years of protecting America's waterways and coastline Aug. 4.

The nation's oldest maritime military, Coast Guard crews work today in 361 U.S. seaports.

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