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The following fish consumption advisory was issued on 05/29/03 ***by the Department of Health & Hospitals, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. For more information, please contact:***

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FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY FOR THE SEVENTH WARD CANAL

In response to recent sampling and analysis of fish-mercury data, the Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals (DHH), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and Department of Wildlife & Fisheries (DWF) are issuing the following advisory for the Seventh Ward Canal in Vermillion parish where unacceptable levels of mercury have been detected in flathead catfish (Opelousas catfish), white crappie (sac-a-lait, white perch), freshwater drum (gaspergou), and bowfin (choupique, grinnel). The advisory area includes the Seventh Ward Canal (southwest of Abbeville) only. **This advisory supersedes a previous advisory issued for this water body by the state in July of 1997.**

DHH, DEQ, and DWF advise that the following precautions be taken when eating fish taken from the Seventh Ward Canal:

- **Women of childbearing age and children less than seven years of age should consume no more than ONE MEAL PER MONTH of flathead catfish, white crappie, freshwater drum or bowfin combined from the advisory area (a meal is considered to be half a pound of fish for adults and children).**

- **Other adults and children seven years of age and older should consume no more than FOUR MEALS PER MONTH of flathead catfish, white crappie, freshwater drum or bowfin combined from the advisory area (a meal is considered to be half a pound of fish for adults and children).**

- **Unless the fish species is specifically addressed in the details of the advisory, please limit consumption of all species in an advisory area to 4 meals per month. Louisiana fish consumption advisories are based on the estimate that the average Louisiana resident eats 4 fish meals per month (1 meal = ½ pound). If you or your family members eat more than 4 meals of fish a month from local water bodies, you might increase your health risks. You can contact the Office of Public Health toll free at 1-888-293-7020 for more information about eating fish that contain chemicals.**

Mercury is an element that occurs naturally in the environment. It is released into the environment through natural processes and human activities. Consequently, there are small amounts of mercury in lakes, rivers, and oceans. Nearly all fish contain trace amounts of mercury. They absorb mercury from the water and sediment as they feed on aquatic organisms. Larger predator fish contain more mercury than smaller fish. Therefore, in general, it is recommended that smaller fish be consumed instead of larger ones.

People are exposed throughout their lives to low levels of mercury. One way they can be exposed to mercury is from eating contaminated fish. Health effects from harmful levels of mercury can include nervous system and kidney damage. Developing fetuses are more sensitive to the toxic effects of mercury, especially in the first trimester of pregnancy. In addition to developing fetuses, infants and children are more sensitive to the effects of mercury; therefore, consumption advisories are issued at lower fish tissue concentration levels for these groups.

This advisory is issued as a precaution. Further sampling will be carried out by DEQ to determine the need for modifications to this advisory, including an adjustment of the boundaries if necessary. If you have consumed flathead catfish, white crappie, freshwater drum and/or bowfin from these waters, it is not likely that there is an immediate need to be concerned about the effects of mercury. However, you should consult your personal doctor if you are concerned.

Jimmy Guidry, MD.

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State Health Officer and Medical Director
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Madeline W. McAndrew

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