



# Bay Briefings



A PROGRAM OF THE TCEQ

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## Seafood Consumption Advisories

### Overview

Contamination of fish and shellfish in some areas of Galveston Bay and its tributaries poses a health risk to consumers of these seafoods. The contaminants may be either chemicals or pathogens (disease-causing organisms). Determining what areas of the bay system contain contaminated seafood and advising the public on how to limit those risks are the responsibility of the Department of State Health Services (DSHS). This state agency (formerly the Texas Department of Health) takes seafood samples from water bodies throughout the state, sends the tissue to laboratories, and—based on the laboratory results—determines the degree of risk for consumption.

If contaminant levels are very high, the DSHS makes it illegal to possess certain seafood from certain areas. More commonly, the DSHS advises the general public to limit the number of fish eaten or advises pregnant women or children to eliminate certain fish from their diets. For contaminated oysters, the DSHS will close or restrict the areas of harvesting.

### Fish and Shellfish Consumption Advisories

The current DSHS advisories cover the Houston Ship Channel and portions of Upper Galveston Bay. Most of Galveston Bay and its tributaries are not included in these advisories.

Under one advisory, from U.S. Highway 90 to the Lynchburg Ferry, all species of fish and crabs are listed for limited consumption due to increased levels of the toxic chemicals dioxin, chlorinated pesticides, and polychlorinated biphenyls. PCBs are a family of synthetic organic chemicals once widely used in electrical equipment but now banned.

*Description of the area, species, and contaminants included in Galveston Bay Seafood Advisories issued by the DSHS or its predecessors in 1990, 2001, and 2005. Map Source: Galveston Bay Indicators Project, Houston Advanced Research Center. Data Source: DSHS.*

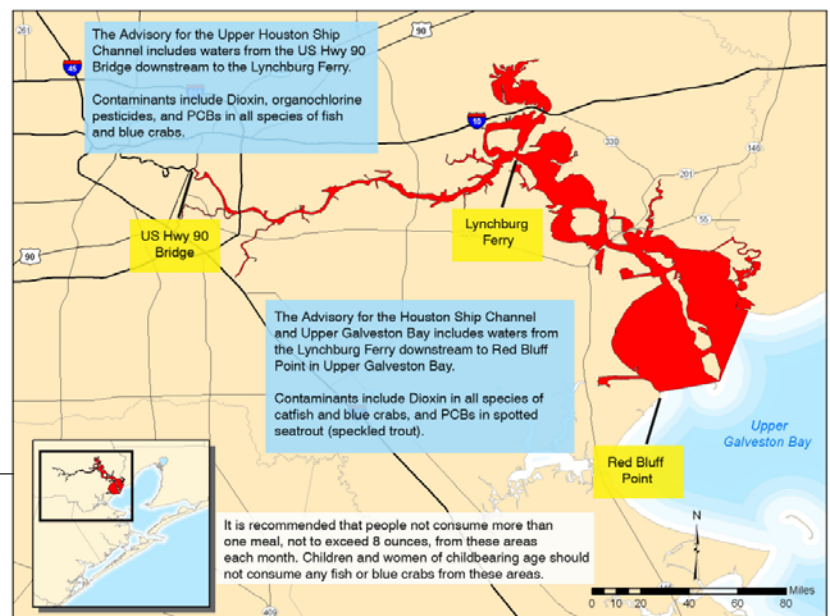
Under the second advisory, from the Lynchburg Ferry to Red Bluff Point, catfish and blue crab are listed for dioxin and speckled trout (spotted sea trout) are listed for PCBs.

For both advisories, the DSHS recommends that the general public eat no more than one meal a month of the listed species, and that women of childbearing age and children not consume any.

### Oyster Harvesting

Oysters filter bacteria from the water as they feed. As a result, bacterial contamination of a water body will be concentrated in oysters. If bacteria are present, then more dangerous pathogens may also be present, so consumption of contaminated oysters poses health risks.

If oysters are contaminated, or if the areas around oyster beds have a high potential for contamination, the DSHS will either close or limit these areas to commercial fishermen and the general public. Currently, about half of the bay is subject to some form of oyster-harvesting restriction by the DSHS.



## What the Estuary Program Is Doing

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program, with its state and federal partners, continues to collect and analyze data from the bay to determine if current advisories need to be expanded or if additional advisories are needed.

The Estuary Program also participates in the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's Total Maximum Daily Load program. TMDLs are a regulatory tool for restoring impaired watersheds (those that do not meet federal water quality standards). Currently, there is a TMDL on the upper Houston Ship Channel for dioxin, which is also addressing PCBs.

## What You Can Do

- Be mindful of your health condition before consuming any raw protein, including raw seafood.
- Respect advisory signs and report any damage to them. Harris County Precinct 2 has placed signs along the ship channel to mark those areas covered by the DSHS advisory.
- Educate yourself and others about seafood contamination.

Visit the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's Web site, [www.gbep.state.tx.us](http://www.gbep.state.tx.us), for up-to-date information and links on seafood safety.



*Recreational fishing is a popular activity in one of the most productive bays in the country. Photo Source: Coastal Conservation Association.*



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