

White, Brian. Middle Willamette River Fish Consumption Study. Last updated 12/4/2000. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. (Reviewed by Elizabeth Parsons)

<http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/willamette/WRBFactSheets.htm>

This resource is a fact sheet describing a scientific study done on the health risks of eating fish from the Willamette River. Because of its history of pollution, past studies on Willamette River fish, and concerns raised by the public, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) studied the human health risks by analyzing samples of fish for toxic chemical content, calculating how much fish was being consumed and by whom, determining which parts of the fish were the most and least toxic, and finding a definitive amount of fish consumption they could safely recommend to the public.

The researchers found that of the different kinds of people consuming fish from the Willamette, the general public on average ate one meal of river fish per month, recreational anglers ate about two meals of river fish per month, and subsistence anglers ate 19 meals of river fish per month. Dangerous chemicals found in the fish samples included PCBs, dioxins, and pesticides. There was an increased risk of cancer for all types of consumers of river fish, and a risk of immune system dysfunction and developmental problems for women, children, and subsistence anglers especially.

The researchers surmised that the chemicals found in the fish were the results of pollution from old mining areas, some naturally occurring sources, and human activity. The PCBs were left over from when they were used to cool electrical transformers (until the mid-1970s). Like the PCBs, many of the pesticides in the fish have been banned but are still found in the environment.

The DEQ recommends that children up to age 6 eat no more than one meal of river fish every seven weeks, that young women eat no more than one meal per month, and that other healthy adults eat no more than one meal per week. Also, only the fillet of the fish should be eaten, and the fats, organs, and eggs should be disposed of.

Critique

Although I found this source online, the organization behind it makes it credible. The DEQ has a Water Quality Division, and within that, a focus on the Willamette River. "Fact sheet" is a misleading description, since the source is more a summary of a scientific study than a list of facts. However, it does include many relevant, straightforward facts on the levels of Willamette River fish consumption, the chemicals found in the fish, and recommendations for consumption. The general public would benefit from having this information.

The fact sheet is short, a bit over two pages long, and omits information about the methods of the study and the tests done on the fish. By including only information about the purpose and results of the study, the DEQ has produced a source that is easily understood by the lay reader. It also includes contact

information for the Water Quality Division office and the names and e-mail addresses of persons who can answer questions.

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