

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Guam EPA, Public Health issue fish consumption advisory for Cocos Lagoon; preliminary results indicate PCBs in fish tissue

The Guam Environmental Protection Agency (Guam EPA) and the Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) today held a joint press conference with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to announce a fish consumption advisory for the Cocos Lagoon in southern Guam. Preliminary results from fish tissue sampling in Cocos Lagoon conducted by the USCG indicate levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) up to 265 times the U.S. EPA recommended screening value for recreational fishers.

**As a precautionary measure, Guam EPA and DPHSS are advising the community to limit or avoid consumption of fish caught in and around the Cocos Lagoon until further notice.** Because the agencies have only preliminary results, there is not enough information to close Cocos Lagoon to fishing at this time. This advisory does not cover swimming, wading, catch-and-release fishing, or any other activity in Cocos Lagoon waters. Specific recommendations for reducing health risks from eating fish suspected to contain chemical pollutants are attached at the end of this release.

The PCB contamination in Cocos Lagoon is suspected to have come from the former USCG Long Range Navigation (LORAN) station on Cocos Island. The station was operational from 1944 to 1963. Components from the LORAN station, including PCB-containing transformers and capacitors, were discovered on land and in the waters near Cocos Island during an environmental investigation conducted by the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard has since removed these components from the area.

As part of their environmental investigation, the Coast Guard sampled fish tissue (12 samples) and soil (a total of 283 surface, sediment, and subsurface samples, including 24 duplicates) for the presence of PCBs. Some soil samples (a total of six surface soil samples, one sediment sample, and five subsurface samples) contained concentrations of PCBs exceeding the U.S. EPA recommended level of 0.22 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg). One specific result was approximately 4,900 times the U.S. EPA recommended level (1,080 mg/kg).

The Coast Guard sampled several fish species within the lagoon, and 11 out of 12 samples exceeded the U.S. EPA recommended screening value for recreational fishers of 0.02 mg/kg. The eleven sample

results for fish tissue contained PCB concentrations ranging from 0.066 to 5.3 mg/kg, or up to 265 times the U.S. EPA recommended level.

Guam EPA has shared this information with the mayor of Merizo, and the agencies involved plan to hold a meeting with the community late next week to discuss the issue and answer questions. Guam EPA and DPHSS are preparing advisory signs and notices, which will be placed along the shore in the area and at other pertinent locations.

The results of the USCG sampling are preliminary, and further studies will be necessary to determine the extent of contamination in the area. The USCG has developed a statement of work for additional sampling and will work with Guam EPA to develop a sampling plan for the follow-up investigation. Guam EPA and DPHSS officials will work closely with the Coast Guard to inform the public of these results and the next steps in the investigation and cleanup process.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING HEALTH RISKS FROM EATING FISH THAT MAY CONTAIN CHEMICAL POLLUTANTS**

*(Source: "A Guide to Healthy Eating of the Fish You Catch," □ U.S. EPA, April 2002)*

*Health Note:* Some chemical pollutants, such as mercury and PCBs, can pose greater risks to women of childbearing age, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children. This group should be especially careful to greatly reduce or avoid eating fish that may contain chemical pollutants.

#### **Catching Fish: Do some fish contain more pollutants than others?**

Yes. You can't look at fish and tell if they contain chemical pollutants. The only way to tell if fish contain harmful levels of chemical pollutants is to have them tested in a laboratory. Follow these guidelines to lower the risk to your family:

- For fish such as snapper, eat the smaller, younger fish (within legal limits). They are less likely to contain harmful levels of pollutants than larger, older fish.
- Eat fewer fatty fish, such as skipjack and snapper, or fish that feed on the bottom of the lagoon, such as goatfish. Also avoid higher-level predators, such as moray eels. These fish are more likely to contain higher levels of chemical pollutants.

#### **Cleaning Fish: Can I clean my fish to reduce the amount of chemical pollutants that might be present?**

Yes. It's always a good idea to remove the skin, fat, and internal organs (where harmful pollutants are most likely to accumulate) before you cook the fish. As an added precaution:

- Remove and throw away the head, guts, kidneys, and the liver.
- Fillet fish and cut away the fat and skin before you cook it.
- Clean and dress the fish as soon as possible.

#### **Cooking Fish: Can I cook my fish to reduce my health risk from eating fish that may contain chemical pollutants?**

Yes. The way you cook fish can make a difference in the kinds and amounts of chemical pollutants

remaining in the fish. Fish should be properly prepared and grilled, baked, or broiled. By letting the fat drain away, you can remove pollutants stored in the fatty parts of the fish. Added precautions include:

- Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that you use to flavor the meal. These drippings may contain higher levels of pollutants.
- Eat less fried or deep fat-fried fish because frying seals any chemical pollutants that might be in the fish □s fat into the portion that you will eat.
- If you like smoked fish, it is best to fillet the fish and remove the skin before the fish is smoked.

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