



**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation**

Albany, N. Y. 12201

Henry L. Diamond  
Commissioner

June 17, 1971

Mr. Alfred E. Runge  
9 Peachtree Lane  
Roslyn, New York 11576

Dear Mr. Runge:

Thank you for your letter concerning waters where fish have been tested for mercury.

We do not have a list of waters for distribution. The New York Times story was in error. Our news release (copy enclosed) suggests that it is safe to eat one meal of fish per week from all but three waters in the State. Details are included in the enclosed release.

Sincerely,

*Carl Parker*

Carl E. Parker  
Chief, Bureau of Fish

CEP:md

Enclosure

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Hollis S. Ingraham M.D., Commissioner

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS

Don J. Wickham, Commissioner

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Henry L. Diamond, Commissioner

FOR RELEASE:

P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 20, 1971

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The State Commissioners of Health, Agriculture and Markets, and Environmental Conservation today announced new, liberalized guidelines for the eating of fresh water fish caught in New York State waters.

The guidelines, developed as a result of extensive testing for methyl mercury by the three Departments -- provide that:

-- With the exception of catches from three bodies of water, it is permissible to eat such fish once a week without fear of mercury contamination;

-- Pregnant women should avoid eating any fresh water fish.

The three bodies of water which are exceptions to the once-a-week rule are:

-- Onondaga Lake, which continues to be the only lake in the state where all fishing is prohibited;

-- Lake George, where lake trout should not be eaten, although other fish are safe to eat on a once-a-week basis; and

-- The St. Lawrence River, where muskellunge should not be eaten. Muskellunge taken in other waters are safe to eat on a once-a-week basis.

Commissioners Don J. Wickham of Agriculture and Markets, Hollis S. Ingraham M.D. of the Health Department, and Henry L. Diamond of Environmental Conservation said the caution about eating fish only once a week applied only to those caught by sport anglers.

Commissioner Wickham pointed out that fish offered for sale commercially are checked by the Department of Agriculture and Markets and must be so low in mercury content (below 0.5 parts per million of mercury, the "actionable" level set by the Federal Food and Drug Administration) that they may be eaten in any amount with no fear of ill effect.

The new guidelines would permit consumption of some fish with more than the FDA-advised limit of methyl mercury content. Commissioner Ingraham said, however, that if fishermen voluntarily limit their consumption of such fish to one meal per week, their mercury intake will be well within safe margins.

Pregnant women were urged by Commissioner Ingraham not to eat any fish taken from State waters pending the outcome of Health Department research on indications that even tiny amounts of methyl mercury tend to concentrate in the fetus.

The research which led to today's revised guidelines involved more than 3,000 fish taken from 125 bodies of water. Fish from every body of water tested contained some trace of mercury, and even preserved fish, caught more than 70 years ago, were found to have measurable amounts of mercury present, although these levels were lower than fish sampled from current catches.

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Freshwater fish caught in New York State waters

All tests were made on the edible portion of the fish. There is no way known to reduce mercury content of fish by selective cleaning, trimming or cooking.

Testing for mercury is continuing, Commissioner Diamond said, because there are indications that fish in some waters may be low enough in mercury to permit their unlimited use. These waters will be identified publically as the necessary additional studies are completed.

While mercury contamination is sometimes a problem in fish, the Health Department has found that water supplies throughout the State are unimpaired for drinking, so far as mercury is concerned. Neither does mercury content of New York's waters interfere with use for swimming or boating.