

(For Immediate Release)



news release

From The Texas Department of Health
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Lavaca Bay Stays Closed for Taking Fish and Crab

Dr. Robert Bernstein, Texas Commissioner of Health, has ordered the continued closure of a small portion of Lavaca Bay to the taking of finfish or crabs for human consumption. The area on the eastern side of Lavaca Bay, south of the Highway 35 causeway and extending around the ALCOA Harbor was closed in April of 1988.

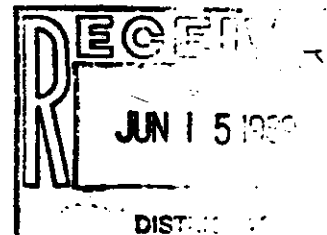
Maps outlining the prohibited area are available through coastal offices of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and local health departments in the Lavaca Bay area.

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) has confirmed that fish and crabs from the closed area continue to be unfit for human consumption because of mercury contaminants. The closure applies to both recreational and commercial fishermen.

The 1988 closure was based on laboratory results which indicated several species of finfish and blue crabs from the area had levels of methylmercury in the tissue exceeding the U.S. Food and Drug Administration guideline for human consumption.

The TDH Environmental Epidemiology Program has determined that although occasional eating of fish from Lavaca Bay would be unlikely

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to cause life-threatening illness, repeated consumption could cause poisoning of some people.

Jerry Ward, toxicologist in the program, said, "Since individual sensitivities to mercury vary, certain groups of people are more susceptible than others. Unborn babies and infants are the most vulnerable to methylmercury because of the sensitivity of their developing nervous systems." Ward said that mercury concentrations which might not harm a pregnant women could still be dangerous to her baby.

"In summary," she said, "ingestion of fish and crabs from this area may constitute a significant threat to public health."

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(For more information contact Jerry Ward, Toxicologist, Environmental Epidemiology Program, at 512/458-7269, or Richard E. Thompson, Director, Division of Shellfish Sanitation Control, at 512/458-7510.)

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