Eating Fish From The Savannah River

from river mile marker 187 (Augusta Lock and Dam) to river mile marker 91 (Hampton County line)

Did you know ...

► Some fish from the Savannah River may contain mercury in them that can cause health problems.

► Some fish in part of the Savannah River may also contain radioactive materials (Cesium, Strontium).

► These fish do not look, smell, or taste different.

Remember ...

► Mercury is more harmful to babies, children and pregnant women.

► Most people can safely eat one meal a week of largemouth bass or one meal a month of bowfin (mudfish) from this part of the Savannah River.

► The Savannah River is safe for boating and swimming.

Why is this important to me?

Eating fish with mercury or radioactive materials (Cesium, Strontium) will not make you sick right away. But as you eat more and more, they may build up in your body and may affect your health.

Mercury is more harmful to babies and children than adults because unborn babies and children have nervous systems (brain, spinal cord, and nerves) that are still forming. Pregnant women can pass mercury to their unborn babies. Mothers can pass it to their babies through breast milk.

Can I still eat fish?

Yes, as long as you follow the advice in this fact sheet. There is no way to clean or cook the fish to get rid of mercury or cesium because these chemicals are stored in the meat of the fish. You can reduce strontium by removing scales and bones before cooking the fish. You can reduce your risk by eating smaller fish, smaller amounts of fish, and eating fish from markets or restaurants. Also, it is better to eat crappie, pickerel, and sunfish because they don't have as much mercury or radioactive materials (Cesium, Strontium) in them as larger species of fish. For more information about how much fish to eat from this part of the Savannah River and other South Carolina and Georgia waters, please call one of the phone numbers on the back of this sheet.

How much fish can I eat?

Most people can safely eat one meal a week of largemouth bass or one meal a month of bowfin (mudfish) from this part of the Savannah River. Unborn babies, infants, and children can be more easily harmed by mercury. If you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, breast-feeding, or have young children, please call one of the telephone numbers on the back of this page for more information.
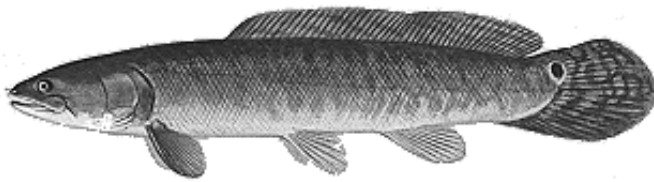
Bowfin (Mudfish)

Will eating fish affect my health?

If you eat fish that contains mercury or radioactive materials for a long time, these chemicals may build up in your body and affect your health.

Mercury collects in the meat of the fish and may be stored in your kidneys and nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and nerves). Mercury is harmful to babies. In adults, any health effects from mercury usually go away as the body gets rid of it.

Cesium collects in the meat of the fish and may build up in your muscles if you eat lots of fish that contains cesium. Cesium is a radioactive substance which can injure cells. Eating these fish may result in a very low risk of developing cancer.

Strontium collects in the scales and bones of fish, and may build up in your bones if you eat these fish. Strontium is a radioactive substance which can injure cells. Eating these fish may result in a very low risk of developing cancer.
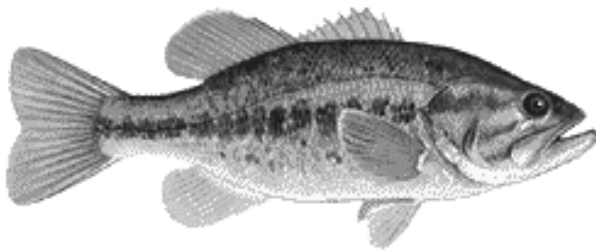
Largemouth Bass

Is catching and releasing O.K.?

Many people enjoy fishing, but want to avoid any risks from eating fish that might contain harmful chemicals. Catching and releasing is a good way to do this and preserve your local fishery.

If you have questions...

803-641-7670
Local South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) Office in Aiken, SC

888-849-7241 (toll free)
SCDHEC Division of Health Hazard Evaluation

888-373-5947 (toll free)
Georgia Department of Natural Resources

800-241-1754 (toll free)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

800-249-8155 (toll free)
U.S. Department of Energy

South Carolina Department
of Health & Environmental Control

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