

“New tissue samples still show mercury in Willamette River fish.” Associated Press 1 Apr. 2004.

(Reviewed by Jessica Miller)

The Associated Press article “New tissue samples still show mercury in Willamette River fish” compares studies on mercury levels in fish from years ago to current studies. The comparison shows that levels have remained relatively stable at a cautionary amount.

The fish analyzed are bass, pike minnow and suckers. State fish consumption advisories have set a threshold at 0.35 parts per million mercury concentration. The fish studied at the Cottage Grove Reservoir, however, are averaging mercury concentrations of 1.63 parts per million.

Ken Kauffman, an environmental health specialist with Oregon Department of Human Services, says that while he does not know of any illnesses relating to such mercury poisoning, the public should not ignore the state health officials' warnings to limit fish consumption.

High mercury concentrations can cause hearing and vision damage as well as nervous system damage. Specifically, women of child-bearing age, children younger than 6 and those with liver and kidney damage should not eat fish from the Cottage Grove Reservoir. Other health adults are advised to limit consumption to one 8-ounce portion a month.

This article also discusses some of the pollution sources and specifies mercury concentrations in fish in different geographical areas of the Willamette.

Critique

Not surprisingly, this article was written with the general population as an intended audience and therefore is easy to understand for those with little science background. “New tissue samples still show mercury in Willamette River fish” gives factual information about the pollutants causing the high mercury levels as well as helpful information about the human health effects.

However, be cautioned that this article is over-simplified and much of the information about specific test sites and fish populations may not necessarily be applicable to other areas of the Willamette River. Neither salmon nor steelhead were tested. Cottage Grove and Dorena Reservoir were both noted as having high mercury contamination within fish populations, but it was not stated whether such findings could reasonably be applicable to other locations along the river.

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