

**Crellin, John R. and Jill J. Dyken. "Public Health Assessment: Initial release (Portland Harbor)." Published 1/15/2002. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Reviewed by Elizabeth Parsons)**

This report, composed by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) within the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, reviews the different health risks associated with a specific stretch of the Willamette River, the Portland Harbor area. The ATSDR periodically conducts studies on nationwide Superfund sites and submits its findings along with recommendations for public health and education. In this report the ATSDR looks at information about sediment contamination levels, fish contamination, the possibility of health risks from recreational use of the harbor, and the different uses of the Willamette River water.

This report was thorough and technical, so I focused on the sections about human health risks. The report concludes that while Willamette River fish should not be eaten (because of extremely high levels of PCBs) there are no direct health risks associated with skin contact. To quote the authors, "[their] evaluation of the sediment exposure pathway considered exposures to sediment that might occur for adults and children during swimming, for children playing in sediment, and for adults while fishing with nets or digging for shellfish. The exposure doses for all the chemicals evaluated are all too low to result in health effects whether the exposure was through accidental swallowing, skin contact, or a combination" (p. 17). The city of Portland does not take its drinking water from the polluted areas of the river, but the report admits the possibility of homeless persons drinking the water in large quantities. They were unable to assess these health risks due to lack of data.

## **Critique**

Although this report was written for an audience of specialists, it included some very helpful information. It was the only source I have been able to find that addresses the issue of possible health risks associated with "dermal exposure" (skin contact), which is the most relevant to me personally. The report is long (48 pages), so I recommend skipping the technical parts and using the table of contents to find the important pieces of information. While it confirms other agencies' recommendations to avoid eating Willamette River fish, it is a relief to know that chemical levels aren't high enough to cause harm through skin contact. Of course, this report concerns only the Portland Harbor, and other stretches of the Willamette River may be more or less contaminated.

<http://www.dhs.state.or.us/publichealth/superfund/docs/phpha.pdf> Accessed on 4/8/2004.

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