

Fish Testing Planned for Lake Chelan and Wenatchee River in 2010

Overview

Scientists from the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) are collecting fish from waters in Chelan County to check for the same toxic chemicals they found in fish in 2003. Ecology will collect fish from the southern basin of Lake Chelan in May or June, from Roses Lake near Manson in September, and from the Wenatchee River in November. The river fish will be collected from Leavenworth to just above the river's confluence with the Columbia River. Results will be ready in December 2011 and will help determine what changes have occurred in contaminant levels over time.

Historical

Results from sampling conducted in 2003 at Lake Chelan and Roses Lake showed high levels of the pesticide DDT in fish. The information helped local governments and Ecology develop a Water Cleanup Plan completed in 2008 (www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/0810048.html).

The plan describes the extent of contamination and calls for various actions to reduce DDT inputs to the lake. The plan also includes periodic monitoring of fish to see how levels of DDT are changing over time.

Results from Ecology's 2003 sampling in the Wenatchee River showed high levels of PCBs in fish as well as elevated levels of DDT. Studies Ecology conducted in 1985 and 1993 also found high levels of DDT and PCBs in fish. Ecology has not yet developed a Water Cleanup Plan for toxic chemicals in the Wenatchee River. Results from the 2010 sampling will help determine what changes have occurred in contaminant levels over time and help determine what actions may be needed.

The Chelan-Douglas Health District and the state Department of Health issued a fish consumption advisory for Lake Chelan in 2006 and one for the Wenatchee River in 2007 (www.doh.wa.gov/fish).



Lake Chelan burbot.

Why It Matters

Once toxic chemicals such as DDT and PCBs get into the food chain, they take decades to be removed. Thankfully these two substances were banned more than 30 years ago. Our best strategy is to control sources of these chemicals and prevent them from getting into the environment in the first place. Ecology's monitoring programs protect public health and help decision-makers choose effective strategies to control the sources of toxic chemicals.

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Monitoring in Chelan County is part of a statewide effort

This year's monitoring efforts in Chelan County are part of broader fish testing efforts Ecology conducts through its Washington State Toxics Monitoring Program (www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/toxics/wstmp.htm). This program has been meeting several goals since it began in 2001:

- Conduct exploratory monitoring to identify toxic contamination in freshwater environments where historical data are lacking.
- Conduct trend monitoring for toxic contaminants in fish and other media.
- Establish cooperative monitoring efforts with other organizations to address issues of concern.
- Establish an Internet Web page featuring toxics monitoring efforts in Washington.
- Focus on main chemicals of concern which include: mercury, chlorinated pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), and polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzo-p-furans (PCDD and PCDFs).

The Exploratory Monitoring component of this program has collected more than 268 fish tissue samples from 130 sites. Ecology added a long-term monitoring component (trend monitoring) in 2009 to track changes in contaminant levels in fish over time. This effort targets sites that have some of the highest levels of toxic contamination in Washington. The long-term monitoring will help determine how well cleanup efforts, such as Water Cleanup Plans, are working to reduce sources and transport of toxic contaminants to waterways and fish.

How do fish pick up toxic contamination?

DDT is a chlorinated pesticide that was commonly used for orchards and other crops before it was banned in 1972 because of its persistence in the environment and toxic effects on wildlife and humans. Historical agricultural practices resulted in DDT getting into lakes and rivers by runoff from rainfall and irrigation waters. PCBs are a group of chemicals used as coolants and lubricants in electrical and mechanical equipment. PCBs were banned in 1977 because of their toxic effects and persistence in the environment. Once these chemicals get into soil and water, fish and wildlife take them up through their food sources.

For more information

Lake Chelan and Wenatchee River water quality

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Monitoring Efforts

Keith Seiders, Ecology's Environmental Assessment Program in Lacey, 360-407-6689 or keith.seiders@ecy.wa.gov
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/toxics/wstmp.htm

Local and State Health Departments

Chelan-Douglas Health District, Marc Marquis, 509-886-6450 or www.cdhd.wa.gov
Washington State Department of Health, Fish Consumption Advisory Program, 1-877-485-7316
www.doh.wa.gov/fish