

## Advice for People Who Eat Fish from the Yakima River

### Overview

In 1993, the Washington State Department of Health issued a fish consumption advisory for the Yakima River due to elevated levels of the chemical DDT. DDT is pesticide that was commonly used in agriculture. At that time, DDT levels in the Yakima River bottom fish were among the highest reported in the United States.

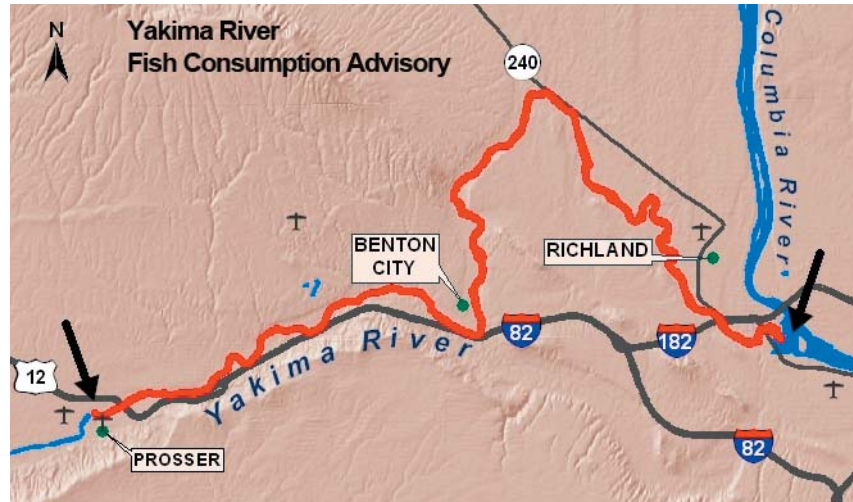
In 1998 and 2002, Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) started two water cleanup plans to meet water quality targets to reduce DDT, dieldrin (pesticide), suspended sediment, and turbidity: 1) The Lower Yakima River Suspended Sediment and DDT Plan and 2) The Upper Yakima River Suspended Sediment and Organochlorine Pesticide Plan.

In 2007, Ecology completed a Yakima River fish tissue study to assess progress in meeting water quality targets for DDT, PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls), and dioxins, and confirm the presence of other pesticides. Ecology scientists found that fish DDT levels had decreased due to basin wide erosion control efforts.

In 2009, the state health department evaluated Ecology's fish tissue data and has removed all fish from the existing advisory due to this sharp decline in DDT levels and has added common carp due to PCBs levels.

### Updated Fish Advisory

Department of Health recommends that everyone, especially women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children limit eating carp from the city of Prosser to the mouth of the Yakima River to one meal per week due to PCBs.



### Statewide Mercury Advisory

There is an existing statewide advisory due to mercury that includes the Yakima River: Women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children should not eat northern pikeminnow and limit largemouth and smallmouth bass to two meals per month.

### What are PCBs and mercury and how do they affect health?

**PCBs** - PCBs were used in closed industrial systems such as electrical transformers and capacitors, and in adhesives, plasticizers, lubricants, and hydraulic fluids. In the late 70's, PCBs were banned because of evidence that they build up in the environment and can cause harmful health effects. Health effects associated with PCB exposure include: hormone disruption, learning and behavior changes, immune system suppression, and cancer. Children exposed to PCBs in the womb may have learning and behavior

problems later in life.

**Mercury** - Mercury is a toxic metal that is found naturally and is introduced through air pollution and improper disposal of mercury containing products such as thermometers, light bulbs, thermostats, and electrical switches. Health effects associated with mercury exposure include: impacts to the nervous system and brain which may affect how children behave, learn, and think, impairment of vision, and tingling in hands and feet. Babies in the womb, nursing babies, and young children are at greatest risk.

### How do PCBs and mercury get into Yakima River fish?

Fish accumulate contaminants from the water or sediments where they live or from the food they eat. PCBs and mercury enter waterbodies through air or direct release. These contaminants can move up the food chain into fish and can be passed to humans who eat fish.

# Healthy Fish Eating Guide for the Yakima River

Advice for everyone - especially women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children.

## Fish to limit from the City of Prosser to the mouth of the Yakima River:

### Common Carp:

1 meal per week\*



Clean and cook fish to reduce exposure to contaminants.

## Fish that are safe and healthy to eat from the Yakima River:

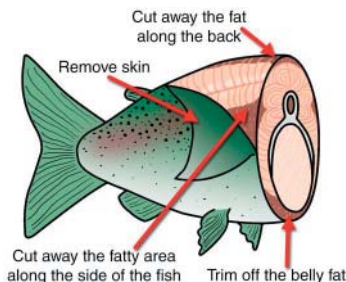
2-3 meals per week\*

- Cutthroat trout
- Kokanee
- Bridgelip sucker
- Mountain whitefish
- Largescale sucker

\* No other fish should be eaten that week.  
A meal is 8 ounces uncooked fish.

## How to clean and cook fish to reduce your exposure to contaminants

Prepare fish the following way to reduce PCBs, DDT, and other contaminants that collect in the fatty parts of fish by up to 50 percent:



- Consume younger, smaller fish (within legal limits).
- When cleaning fish remove the skin, fat, and internal organs before cooking. Do not use for sauce or gravy.
- Grill, bake, or broil fish so that the fat drips off while cooking.

**Mercury is stored in the muscle (fillet) of fish and cannot be reduced by cleaning this way.**

## Contact Information:

### Fish Advisories in Washington State

Washington State Department of Health  
Fish Consumption Advisories Program  
Toll Free: 1-877-485-7316 [www.doh.wa.gov/fish](http://www.doh.wa.gov/fish)

### Yakima River Water Quality

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[www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/tmdl/yakima\\_wq/YakToxicsTMDL.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/tmdl/yakima_wq/YakToxicsTMDL.html)

## Statewide Mercury Advisory

Advice for women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, or if you are feeding young children:

### Northern Pikeminnow:

DO NOT EAT



### Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass:

2 meals per month



## Health Benefits of Fish

Eat fish to gain the health benefits, but choose fish wisely to protect you and your family from contaminants in fish.

- Fish is a vital part of a healthy diet. Fish is high in protein, low in fat, and full of nutrients.
- Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are not found naturally in our bodies.
- Fish is good for your heart. By eating fish you can help prevent heart disease and stroke by reducing blood pressure, inflammation, and blood clotting.
- Omega-3 fatty acids are essential during pregnancy for the healthy development of a child's brain, retina, and nerve tissue.

The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least 2 times per week.



"It is important to continue to eat fish, be smart and choose fish wisely."

Dr. Maxine Hayes  
State Health Officer

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