

Fish Consumption in the Haw River Watershed

Sadly, in North Carolina **all** surface waters are considered (by the state and EPA) to be impaired for mercury pollution. This mercury comes mostly from airborne emissions from coal fired power plants – many as far away as the Midwest! Incinerators (such as Stericycle in Graham NC) and cement plants are also sources.

The fish we catch and eat in the Haw River watershed can have too much mercury – especially in predator fish like bass that are higher on the food chain. Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that harms the developing hearts, lungs and brains of fetuses, infants and toddlers, so consumption of fish with mercury in it by children and women of child bearing age is especially dangerous. Mercury does NOT belong in our air or our water. This is a crime against all of us. We should be able to safely eat the fish we catch from our waters.

What can you do?

Eat Fish Safely:

Find out what fish are highest in mercury, and what amounts are safe to eat, depending on age and gender. Largemouth Bass, chain pickerel, catfish, and yellow perch are common fish in our watershed that are considered high in mercury.

Go to the state's Fish Consumption Advisory website for current information:

<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oe/fish/advisories.html>.

Information from the state's Fish Consumption Advisory:

Women of Childbearing Age (15-44 years), Pregnant Women, Nursing Women, and Children under 15:

Do not eat fish high in mercury, including largemouth bass caught in the state. Eat up to two meals per week of fish low in mercury. A meal is 6 ounces of uncooked fish for adults, or 2 ounces of uncooked fish for children under 15.

All Other Individuals:

Eat no more than one meal per week of fish high in mercury, including largemouth bass caught in the state. Eat up to four meals per week of fish low in mercury. A meal is 6 ounces of uncooked fish for adults, or 2 ounces of uncooked fish for children under 15.

Information about mercury in fish, from the state's Fish Consumption Advisory:

<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oe/mercury/safefish.html>

Fish LOW in mercury:

Ocean Fish:

- Black drum
- Canned light tuna
- Cod
- Crab
- Croaker
- Flounder
- Haddock
- Halibut
- Herring
- Jacksmelt
- Lobster
- Mahi-mahi
- Ocean perch
- Oysters
- Pollock
- Pompano
- Red drum
- Salmon (canned, fresh or frozen)
- Scallops
- Sheepshead
- Shrimp
- Skate
- Southern kingfish (sea mullet)
- Spot
- Speckled trout (spotted sea trout)
- Tripletail
- Whitefish
- Whitegrunt

Freshwater Fish:

- Bluegill sunfish
- Farm-raised catfish
- Farm-raised trout
- Farm-raised crayfish

- Tilapia
- Trout

Fish HIGH in mercury:

Ocean Fish:

- Albacore (white) tuna** fresh or canned
- Almaco jack
- Banded rudderfish
- Cobia
- Crevalle jack
- Greater amberjack
- South Atlantic grouper (gag, scamp, red and snowy)
- King mackerel
- Ladyfish
- Little tunny
- Marlin
- Orange roughy
- Shark
- Spanish mackerel
- Swordfish
- Tilefish
- Tuna, fresh or frozen**

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Freshwater Fish:

- Blackfish (bowfin)*
- Black crappie***
- Catfish (caught wild)*
- Jack fish (chain pickerel)*
- Largemouth bass (statewide)
- Walleye from Lake Fontana and Lake Santeetlah (Graham and Swain counties)
- Warmouth*
- Yellow perch*

*High mercury levels have been found in blackfish (bowfin), catfish, jack fish (chain pickerel), warmouth, and yellow perch caught south and east of Interstate 85.

**Different species from canned light tuna.

***High mercury levels have been found in black crappie caught south and east of Interstate 95.

Current fish advisories in effect for North Carolina are available on the Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology [Current Fish Advisories](#) page as well as through the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#).

For additional information:

- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry: [Mercury](#)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: [Fish Advisories](#)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: [Seafood Information and Resources](#)
- Gateway to Government Food Safety Information (foodsafety.gov): [Consumer advice on seafood](#)
- Contact the Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch of the Division of Public Health at (919) 707-5900.