

Q: Why are health officials reminding the public to avoid eating fish and other seafood from Area 1 of New Bedford Harbor?

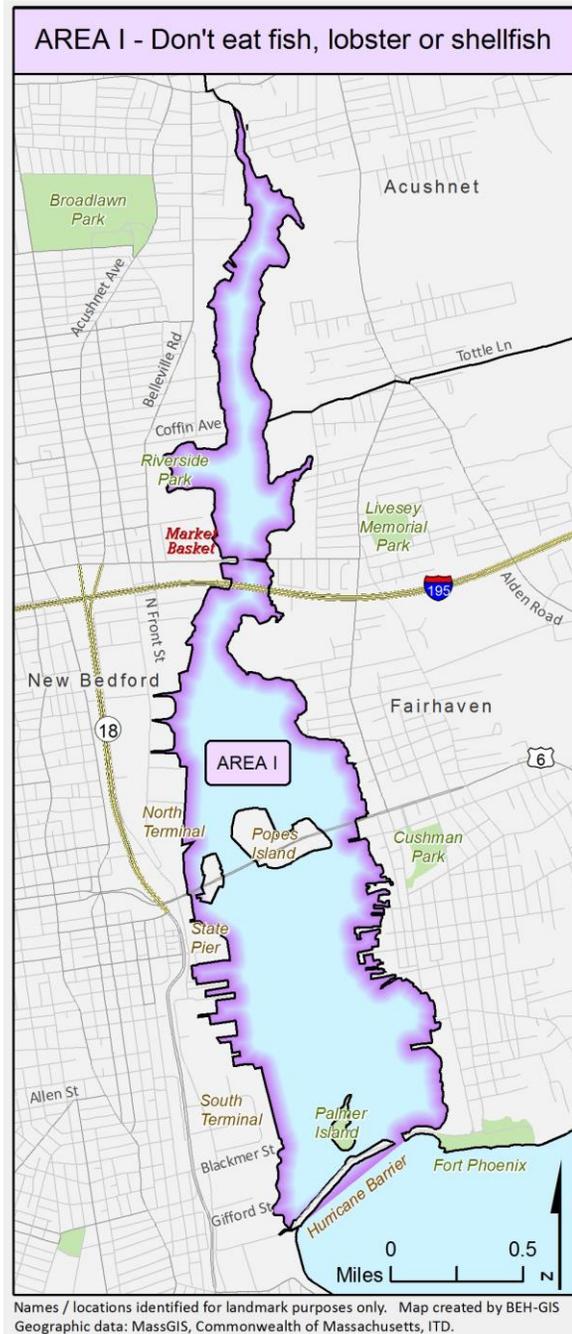
A: In 1979 the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) promulgated regulations to close Area 1 to all fishing activities due to significant polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination. Recent reports of individuals fishing in that area are prompting health and environmental officials to raise public awareness regarding the health risks associated with consumption of fish, lobster, and shellfish taken from Area 1 and regulatory bans.

Q: Where is Area 1 located and what are the boundaries?

A: Area 1 is bounded by the communities of New Bedford and Fairhaven and includes all areas of the Acushnet River and New Bedford Harbor north of the Hurricane Barrier as shown on the map. The Hurricane Barrier is located near Gifford Street in New Bedford and Fort Phoenix Beach State Reservation in Fairhaven.

Q: What is the concern about Area 1?

A: The Acushnet River estuary, New Bedford Harbor, and parts of Buzzards Bay sediments are contaminated with PCBs. The highest levels of PCBs in seafood are found in fish, lobster, and shellfish in Area 1. **Fish, lobster or shellfish caught from Area 1 should not be consumed.**



Q: What are PCBs and where do they come from?

A: PCBs are a group of manmade chemicals that are highly stable, heat resistant, and non-flammable and they do not evaporate or dissolve easily in water. Historically, PCBs have been used as industrial chemicals and insulating material in electrical equipment, and were added to paint, pesticides, carbonless copy paper, printing inks and dyes. The manufacture of PCBs was banned in 1979. Industries that once operated in New Bedford primarily used PCBs in the manufacture of electrical capacitors and transformers. Researchers have found that exposure to PCBs from consuming contaminated fish can pose a risk to human health. The seriousness of the effect varies.

Q: How are people exposed to PCBs?

A: In general, consumption of contaminated fish and shellfish is the major source of human exposure to PCBs. PCBs concentrate (accumulate) in the tissue and internal organs of fish. As big fish eat little fish, they accumulate all the PCBs that have been eaten by smaller fish that are below them in the food chain. This process is known as bioaccumulation. Bottom feeding and high fat containing fish tend to accumulate higher PCB levels than other varieties.

Q: Where can I find fish that are safe to eat?

A: Local restaurants, fish markets, and other food establishments are a safe source. They are inspected at least annually by the local Board of Health in accordance with 105 CMR 590.000: State Sanitary

Code Chapter X – Minimum Sanitation Standards for Food Establishments, also known as the Food Code. Routine inspections help ensure all consumers can safely enjoy the many benefits of our local fishing industry. New Bedford’s commercial fishing fleet travels many miles outside of the harbor to fishing grounds hundreds of miles out to sea, and well beyond the area impacted by PCB contamination so their catch is safe to eat.

Q: Does MDPH have other advice regarding fish and shellfish consumption?

A: Yes. Massachusetts public health officials promote a varied diet, including eating a variety of fish and shellfish from a variety of sources. MDPH has general statewide fish consumption advice for sensitive populations (pregnant women, nursing mothers, children under age 12, and women who may become pregnant). These sensitive individuals should limit consumption of all fish and shellfish (including those from the non-restricted areas) to two meals per week. In addition, the MDPH statewide Safe Eating Guidelines recommends that sensitive populations should not eat bluefish caught off the Massachusetts coast, swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tilefish, and tuna steak. Sensitive populations should also avoid consumption of recreationally caught freshwater fish.

Q: The advice in this pamphlet is specific to the area inside of the hurricane barrier in New Bedford Harbor. Are fish outside of the hurricane barrier in the harbor safe to eat?

A: Although the most contaminated fish are generally found inside the hurricane barrier, MDPH still advises against eating bottom feeding fish and lobster within

the outer portions of New Bedford Harbor. As with all other marine areas, the statewide fish consumption advice referenced above is also in effect.

Q: What is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) doing to address PCB contamination issues in New Bedford Harbor?

A: The U.S. EPA has been involved with the New Bedford Harbor cleanup since the 1980s, following discovery of PCBs in sediment and fish and designation to the NPL in 1983. In 1998, EPA proposed a dredging remedy for the Upper and Lower Harbors, and full scale dredging started in 2004. From 2004 to 2013 EPA operated with \$15 million on the harbor for approximately 45 days a year to address contaminated material. On September 19, 2013 EPA finalized a Settlement with the responsible party, AVX, for \$366.25 million. This settlement will accelerate the cleanup of PCB’s in the harbor to be complete in an estimated 5 to 7 years. For more information on the EPA clean-up, or for other site-related questions, please contact the EPA at 617-918-1003 or visit www.epa.gov/nbh.

Q: Who should I contact if I have health questions about seafood consumption restrictions for Area 1 or other fish consumption advice?

A: For health-related questions, Area 1 restrictions on fish, lobster, and shellfish, or to learn more about how to choose fish that are safe to eat, please contact the MDPH Bureau of Environmental Health at 617-624-5757 or the New Bedford Health Department at 508-991-6199.

December 2014

**Health Officials
Remind Consumers
Not to Eat Fish,
Lobster and Shellfish
from Area 1/Inside the
Hurricane Barrier of
New Bedford Harbor**



Bureau of Environmental Health
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
www.state.ma.us/dph/environmental_health



This brochure was developed by MDPH in partnership with the City of New Bedford and the U.S. EPA.