

# FISH SMART, EAT SMART

## A GUIDE TO EATING FISH CAUGHT IN THE ERIE AREA



Fish is good for you, but some fish caught in Pennsylvania may contain chemicals of concern such as mercury and PCBs.

Protect your family's health,  
follow the advice in this brochure!

### Health Risks vs. Benefits

Fish are part of a healthy, balanced diet. They are high in protein and low in saturated fats. Doctors also believe that eating fish once a week can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Unfortunately, because of pollution, many of our Lake Erie fish have built up high levels of harmful toxins. Some toxins, like mercury, harm the developing nervous system of babies, infants, and young children. Others, like PCBs, can affect internal organs, the immune system, and may even cause cancer. Many of these toxins can be passed from the mother to an unborn child through the blood or to infants through breast milk.



Some fish have higher levels of contaminants than others. In general, we suggest that you limit your consumption of sport fish caught in Lake Erie to one, half-pound meal per week. However, some fish should be eaten less often than that and some are not safe to eat at all. By following the suggestions in this pamphlet, you will be able to obtain the benefits of eating fish while reducing the risk.

### Who is at Risk?

- People who regularly eat Lake Erie sport fish
- Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant
- Babies and children under the age of seven

### Additional Information:

These precautions will not reduce the amount of mercury or other metals in the fish you eat. Mercury is distributed throughout a fish's muscle tissue — the part you eat— rather than the fat and skin. Therefore, the only way to reduce the amount of mercury intake is to reduce the amount of contaminated fish you eat. In Pennsylvania the state-wide health advisory recommends that you limit your consumption of fish caught in state waters to one half-pound meal per week.

### For more information contact:

- ◀ Pennsylvania Department of Health for questions about the effects of chemicals on human health: 717-787-1708 or [www.health.state.pa.us](http://www.health.state.pa.us)
- ◀ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for questions about current advisories, waters sampled and sampling methods: 717-787-9637 or [www.depweb.state.pa.us](http://www.depweb.state.pa.us) Keyword : "Fish Advisories" Public Advisories
- ◀ Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission for questions about the effects of chemicals on fisheries and current advisories: 814-359-5147 or [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us)

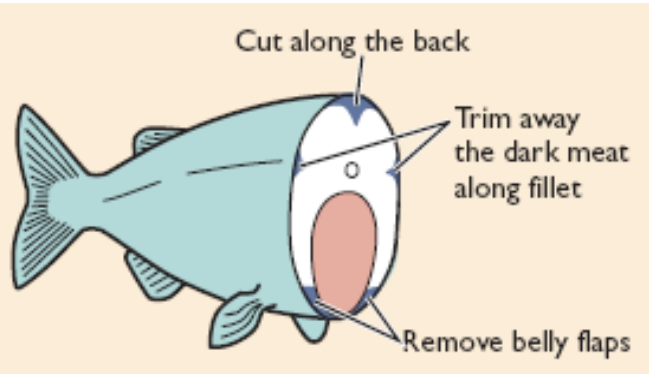
### Special thanks to:

**Kelvin Burch**, Department of Environmental Protection, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

**Jim Grazio**, Department of Environmental Protection, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



## How to Prepare the Fish you Eat



It's not possible to remove **ALL** the chemical contaminants from the fish you eat. If you eat Lake Erie fish, here are suggestions that will help **REDUCE** your consumption of chemicals:

- Choose **SMALL** (legal size) fish  
(If you're buying the fish, always ask what kind of fish it is and where it was caught.)
- Remove skin, fat and dark meat before you cook (see graphic above)
- AVOID FRYING the fish. Frying retains the fat, where most of the chemicals are stored.
- Broil, bake, boil, or poach the fish.
- Drain off all the cooking juices and **THROW THEM AWAY** rather than eating them.

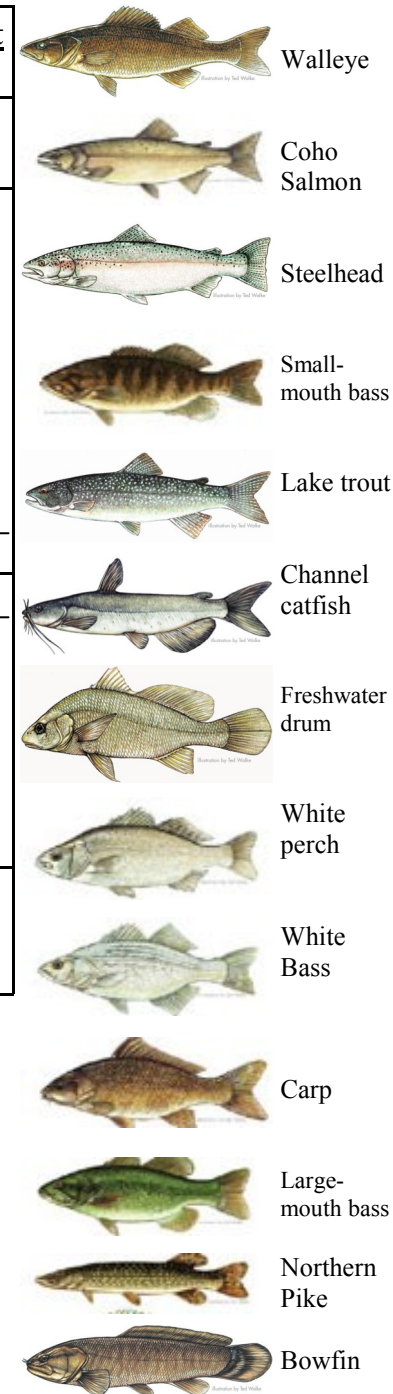
**NOTE:** Proper preparation and cooking can reduce PCB content, but not mercury content.

**REMEMBER:** Choose smaller fish whenever possible. Avoid frying the fish or eat the cooking juices. This increases your intake of fat which contains most of the contaminants. Instead broil, bake, boil, or poach your fish.

## Lake Erie, Presque Isle Bay, and Conneaut Creek Advisories

<u>Area Under Advisory</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Meal Frequency</u>	<u>Contaminant</u>
<b>Lake Erie Open Waters</b>	Walleye under 23"	Two Meals a Month	Mercury
	Walleye 23" and over Coho Salmon* Steelhead* (Rainbow Trout) Smallmouth bass Lake trout Channel catfish Freshwater drum White perch White bass Lake whitefish Carp under 20"	One Meal a Month	PCB
	Carp 20" and over	Do Not Eat	PCB
<b>Presque Isle Bay</b>	Largemouth bass	Two Meals a Month	Mercury
	Smallmouth bass Northern pike White perch Freshwater drum Bowfin Carp under 20" Coho salmon * Steelhead * (Rainbow trout)	One Meal a Month	PCB
<b>Conneaut Creek (Erie County)</b>	Smallmouth bass	Two Meals a Month	Mercury

\*=migratory fish; The fish are found seasonally in Presque Isle Bay or in Lake Erie tributary streams. Whether caught in the Lake or elsewhere, the fish should be treated as Lake Erie fish.



### Snapping Turtle Advice:

Snapping Turtles are long-lived aquatic animals that eat fish. They can store large amounts of toxins in their meat and fat, over ten times more than fish. If you choose to eat snapping turtles, you should carefully trim away the fat and internal organs before cooking the meat or making soup.



Photo courtesy of [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org)